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## **Zhu Xi and Meister Eckhart: two intellectual profiles**

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# ZHU XI AND MEISTER ECKHART: TWO INTELLECTUAL PROFILES

**Shuhong Zheng**

## **Abstract**

This book attempts a comparative study between Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200), a Neo-Confucian master of the Song Dynasty in China, and Meister Eckhart (1260-1327), a scholastic and mystic in the medieval West. With a focus on the theme of human intellect as presented in the works of the two thinkers, this study also explores the massive hermeneutical framework in which that concept is unfolded in Zhu Xi and in Eckhart. Thus, the complexity of each thinker's understanding of the human intellect is demonstrated in its own context, and the common themes between them are discussed in their own terms. Based on a systematic study of the original texts, the comparison between Zhu Xi and Meister Eckhart goes much deeper than a general dialogue between East and West. The comparative model of this book, based strictly on textual study, aims to develop an in-depth communication between a scholastic Confucian mind and his equally sophisticated counterpart in Christendom, in the hope that the intellectual brilliance and spiritual splendour of one thinker will be illuminated by the light of the other. Probably only when one encounters a like-minded counterpart brought up in a totally different tradition will such a mutual illumination become meaningful.

*To my son Aaron and my husband Jin*

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## Abbreviations

### Zhu Xi

- ZZQS*     *Zhu Zi Quan Shu* 朱子全書 (*Complete Works of Zhu Xi*)  
*SSZJJZ*   *Si Shu Zhangju Jizhu* 四書章句集註 (*Commentaries on the Four Books*)  
*LYJZ*     *Lun Yu Jizhu* 論語集註 (*Commentary on the Analects*)  
*MZJZ*     *Meng Zi Jizhu* 孟子集註 (*Commentary on the Book of Mencius*)  
*DXZJ*     *Da Xue Zhangju* 大學章句 (*Commentary on The Great Learning*)  
*DXHW*   *Da Xue Huo Wen* 大學或問 (*Questions and Answers concerning The Great Learning*)  
*SSHW*     *Si Shu Huo Wen* 四書或問 (*Questions and Answers concerning the Four Books*)  
*ZZWJ*     *Zhu Zi Wen Ji* 朱子文集 (*A Collection of the Literary Work of Zhu Xi*)  
*ZZYL*     *Zhu Zi Yu Lei* 朱子語類 (*Conversations of Zhu Xi Topically Classified*)

### Eckhart

- LW*     *Lateinische Werke*  
*DW*     *Deutsche Werke*  
*MHG*   *Middle High German*

## Introduction

The intellectual and spiritual splendour of the medieval period is marked not only by the achievements of the great souls in Christendom, but also by the accomplishments of their counterparts in the Confucian world. Despite being brought up according to different scriptures, living in different social and cultural milieus, thinking and writing in different languages, still some similarities can be seen between a medieval Christian theologian and his counterpart in the Far East. A comparative research that aims to reveal the inter-cultural or inter-religious analogies between the two traditions is a risky but intriguing journey. The case of Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200) and Meister Eckhart (1260-1328) offers an exemplary pair of such inter-religious analogies, a unique and fascinating one.

At first sight it seems out of the question to draw an analogy between Zhu Xi the rationalistic Neo-Confucian master and Eckhart the Dominican master of mysticism, let alone to embark upon a comparative study of the two. Admittedly, in general terms the similarities between Zhu Xi and Eckhart are not as obvious as those between Zhu Xi and Thomas Aquinas, between Eckhart and Zen Buddhism or even between Eckhart and Wang Yangming. It takes further exploration of their academic works to detect the correspondence between Eckhart and Zhu Xi. Once we turn to the masterpieces of the two thinkers, in particular the sophisticated scriptural commentaries they have contributed to their respective intellectual traditions, it will become explicit to us that beneath all the differences lie two great minds whose intellectual and spiritual brilliance refuses a single epithet such as 'rationalistic' or 'mystic'. A systematic study of primary sources brings to light a common ground between the two great minds, namely their emphasis on the power of the human intellect, and the kind of intellectualism expressed through their works.

Such a common ground allows us to place Zhu Xi and Eckhart together and to embark on a comparative study. Accordingly, this study will focus on the concept of the human intellect. The task of this book, therefore, is not to give a general explanation of the differences and similarities between the two thinkers, but to consider a more specific question, that of how the concept of the human intellect is unfolded in Zhu Xi and in Eckhart. For that purpose the hermeneutical framework must also be considered. Hence, this book will explore not only Zhu Xi and Eckhart's understanding of the



human intellect, but also the issue of hermeneutics, which speaks of the unique expression of their thinking.

The hypothesis to be put forward in this study is that for both Zhu Xi and Meister Eckhart the concept of the human intellect constitutes a principal theme running through their works, ranging from scriptural commentary to systematic philosophical discourse. In both thinkers we see reformatory or revolutionary ideas that are developed surrounding the notion of 'knowing'. Such is the vitality of this notion that it is through rethinking and redefining the power of 'knowing' that both Zhu Xi and Meister Eckhart surpass the conventional way of their antecedents, and achieve more than their own traditions may allow for. In Zhu Xi's ingenious treatment of *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning*, in particular his *Bu Zhuan* 補傳 *Supplement* to the section on the investigation of things and extension of knowledge, and in Eckhart's *Parisian Question 1*, a similar provocative voice is heard.

The methodology of this book encompasses three main points. First, the scope of the study is clearly defined, so as to focus on one common theme running through major works of the two thinkers, rather than forming a comparison in general terms. For that reason it does not address the conventional views deriving from general discussions over the differences between East and West, or between Confucianism and Christianity. Secondly, the book attempts to embed systematic textual analysis into the structure of a comparative model, in order that the characteristics and complexity of Zhu Xi and Eckhart's thought concerning the human intellect can be demonstrated in considerable detail with the support of textual studies. Thirdly, since both thinkers employ a set of philosophical terminologies and weave philosophical speculation into their scriptural commentaries, the study combines discussion of their philosophical ideas with an analysis of the hermeneutical rules that underpin their philosophical interpretation of the relevant scriptural texts.

As suggested above, the choice of Zhu Xi and Eckhart and the focus on the issue of the human intellect constitute a deliberate attempt to move away from the over-stressed issue of moral subjectivity within Confucian studies of the last few decades, and to turn to the rational line of thought that represents another essential thread of Confucian tradition. In relation to this concern, this study will give more consideration to the historical proceedings of a philosophical notion and the inner logic of Chinese intellectual history, rather than the forging of a highly individualised conception whose origin is beyond the scope of history and whose justification is based solely on personal

intuition or experience. As will be revealed, original thinkers such as Zhu Xi and Eckhart do not necessarily break away from their own intellectual tradition: despite a tension with some conventional approaches or traditional ways of thinking, both Zhu Xi and Eckhart endeavour to merge their thought into the scholarly tradition so as to enrich it by bringing about new perspectives and shedding new light on old topics. Based on the consideration of a philosophical idea's dependence on its intellectual tradition, this book will not follow the modern New-Confucian scholars' promotion of the so-called Confucian moral subjectivity or moral idealism, despite taking into account their criticism of Zhu Xi on this ground. Instead it will place more emphasis on the historical study of Zhu Xi's thought, which offers a contextual reading of Zhu Xi.

The need to address the hermeneutical issue derives solely from the significant role it plays in the primary sources, those of both Zhu Xi and Eckhart. For the sake of clarity and fluency in expression, I will not insert into this comparative study a dialogue with the modern theory of hermeneutics or epistemology, or a conversation with Buddhism on the issue of spirituality. These extended questions and topics will be better addressed in another monograph or paper.

Given the copious primary sources left by Zhu Xi, this study will focus only on the texts essential to the question under discussion. Hence his *Da Xue Zhangju* 大學章句 *Commentary on The Great Learning* and *Da Xue Huo Wen* 大學或問 *Questions and Answers concerning The Great Learning* will be the fundamental texts for the study of Zhu Xi's thought, with further reference to more detailed elaboration, as seen in *Yu Lei* 語類 *Conversations* and *Wen Ji* 文集 *Literary Works*.<sup>1</sup>

As historical study has long been the weightiest part of Confucian tradition, an exploration of the philosophical ideas of Confucian masters cannot be performed without considering their historical significance.<sup>2</sup> It is remarkable in Confucian tradition that historical consciousness has the upper hand over philosophical speculation. Even if we believe that Confucian masters have developed philosophical concepts capable of universal application, a systematic formulation of such philosophical ideas is rarely seen; moreover, given the emphasis on historical concerns,

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<sup>1</sup> All the aforementioned sources are included in *Zhuzi Quanshu* 朱子全書 *Complete Works of Master Zhu* (2003), 27 volumes.

<sup>2</sup> Collingwood's insightful explanation as to the distinction between the method of history and the method of science is of great help in the pursuit of proper methodology for the study of Confucianism in the modern era. See R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (1961).

it is very hard to look at a philosophical Confucian notion outside of its specific historical framework. As a result there is always a tension between philosophy and historicity, between a historical approach and a philosophical approach, in the study of the philosophy of Confucianism, or of Chinese thought on a large scale. Hence it is necessary that the research on Zhu Xi's notion of knowing is built on a general understanding of the history of Chinese philosophy, and in that respect this book has recourse chiefly to the work of Feng Youlan 馮友蘭.<sup>3</sup> For the period of Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism, it relies mainly on the sources provided by the two *Xue An* 學案 *Anthologies*;<sup>4</sup> the work of Lao Siguang 勞思光<sup>5</sup> is also referred to.<sup>6</sup>

The understanding of Zhu Xi in this book is indebted to the researches done by Qian Mu 錢穆 and Yu Yingshi 余英時, in particular Qian Mu's 錢穆 *Zhuzi Xin Xue An* 朱子新學案 *A New Anthology of Zhu Xi*,<sup>7</sup> and Yu Yingshi's 余英時 *Zhu Xi de Lishi Shijie* 朱熹的历史世界 *The Historical World of Zhu Xi*.<sup>8</sup> In the scholarly works of both Qian and Yu, we find a comprehensive account of textual analysis as well as the details concerning the historical and political context in which Zhu Xi lived. As historians both Qian and Yu attempt to embed an individual thinker into the whole history of intellectual development of Confucian tradition, so as to reveal the continuation from and variation between one and another. The innovative element in one's thought will be examined in the light of the long-standing scholarly tradition in which the thinker has been brought up. The vast landscape of Chinese thought depicted by Qian Mu and the complex historical context of Zhu Xi unfolded in Yu Yingshi's work have established the groundwork for this study, and their approaches also have an impact on its methodology, although the focus of this research is on philosophical ideas rather than historical facts.

<sup>3</sup> Feng Youlan 馮友蘭, *Zhongguo Zhexueshi* 中國哲學史 *History of Chinese Philosophy* (1992), 2 volumes.

<sup>4</sup> Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 and Quan Zuwang 全祖望 (eds.), *Song-Yuan Xue An* 宋元學案 *Anthology of Song-Yuan Confucianism* (1986), 4 volumes; Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 (ed.), *Ming Ru Xue An* 明儒學案 *Anthology of the Ming Confucian Masters* (2008), 2 volumes.

<sup>5</sup> Lao Siguang 勞思光, *Zhongguo Zhexueshi* 中國哲學史 *History of Chinese Philosophy* (1981), part 3, 2 volumes.

<sup>6</sup> For an analysis of typical New-Confucian notions such as moral subjectivity or moral idealism, and their influence on the stance towards Confucian intellectual history, see Ma Kaizhi 馬愷之, 'Lishixing, Zhexue yu Xiandaixing de Mingyun: Lao Siguang de Zhongguo Zhexueshi yu Leo Strauss 歷史性、哲學與現代性的命運: 勞思光的《中國哲學史》與列奧施特勞斯 Historicity, Philosophy and the Fate of Modernity: Lao Siguang's History of Chinese Philosophy and Leo Strauss' (2008), 51-104.

<sup>7</sup> Qian Mu 錢穆, *Zhuzi Xin Xue An* 朱子新學案 *A New Anthology of Master Zhu*, collected in *Qian Binsi Xianshen Quanji* 錢賓四先生全集 *Complete Works of Qian Mu* (1994-1998), 11-5.

<sup>8</sup> Yu Yingshi 余英時, *Zhu Xi de Lishi Shijie* 朱熹的历史世界 *The Historical World of Zhu Xi* (2004), 2 volumes.

In contrast to Qian and Yu, the modern New-Confucian scholars have adopted a different approach, reinterpreting Confucian tradition according to a new theoretical framework borrowed from Buddhism and the West; in other words, they read Confucianism in the light of Buddhism and Western philosophy, in particular the philosophical conceptions of Kant and Hegel. Among these scholars the most prominent and influential figure is Mou Zongsan 牟宗三. Mou's reinterpretation or reconstruction of Confucian tradition is based on a systematic borrowing of Kantian concepts: to be precise, a cross-reading of Kant and Confucianism. Inspired by Kant, Mou intends to anchor his thinking in the realm of the noumenal; but unlike Kant, who seeks the metaphysical principles or non-empirical conditions for morals, Mou assigns his 'moral metaphysics' a rather different task, to formulate within Confucian tradition a practical or experiential approach toward self-accomplishment that is simultaneously performing in the dimension of metaphysical, cosmological or ontological reality. The term '*daode de xingshangxue* 道德的形上學 moral metaphysics' in Mou's context has an origin in Kant's thinking concerning the metaphysics of morals, but, Mou claims, it aims to overcome the limitation of Kant's *daode de shenxue* 道德的神學 moral theology.<sup>9</sup> While Mou draws upon Kant with regard to philosophical speculation, he has never intended to think in the vein of Kant or to form a criticism in Kantian terms, but is simply 'borrowing' Kantian conceptions to serve his own theoretical purposes. Such a stance somehow determines Mou's failure in many aspects from an academic point of view. His understanding of Kant is problematic, and his application of Kantian concepts to Confucian ethics invites more questions, as pointed out by Confucian scholars in the Chinese tradition and in the West.<sup>10</sup> Mou's three volumes of *Xinti yu Xingti* 心體與性體 *Constitutive Mind and Constitutive Nature*<sup>11</sup> and the subsequent *Cong Lu Xiangshan dao Liu Jishan* 從陸象山到劉蕺山 *From Lu Xiangshan to Liu Jishan*<sup>12</sup> give a new classification of the intellectual development in Confucian history. In these four volumes, Mou falls back on Kant and uses Kantian concepts to undermine Zhu Xi's orthodox status. According to Mou's innovative classification, Zhu Xi is treated as a side branch in contrast to mainstream Confucianism, which is believed to be

<sup>9</sup> Mou Zongsan 牟宗三, *Xinti yu Xingti* 心體與性體 *Constitutive Mind and Constitutive Nature* (1968), 1,181.

<sup>10</sup> For a detailed explication of this problem in Mou Zongsan's moral metaphysics, see S. Billioud, *Thinking through Confucian Modernity* (2012).

<sup>11</sup> Mou Zongsan 牟宗三, *Xinti yu Xingti* 心體與性體 *Constitutive Mind and Constitutive Nature* (1968), 3 volumes.

<sup>12</sup> Mou Zongsan 牟宗三, *Cong Lu Xiangshan dao Liu Jishan* 從陸象山到劉蕺山 *From Lu Xiangshan to Liu Jishan* (1979).

represented by masters from the School of Mind. The defect of Mou Zongsan's approach has been pointed out by many Chinese scholars, among them Zhu Pingci, whose 祝平次, a critique of Mou's methodology, stands out. Zhu reflects the three Kantian terminologies - will, knowledge and morality - which dominate Mou's criticism of Zhu Xi, and points out the conceptual inappropriateness in Mou's system, which seems to undermine the legitimacy of his approach according to the modern academic standard.<sup>13</sup>

Mou Zongsan's criticism of Zhu Xi is made explicit in the works of Tang Junyi 唐君毅<sup>14</sup> and Xu Fuguan 徐復觀,<sup>15</sup> and is implicit in Tu Weiming's 杜維明 interpretation of Confucian thought.<sup>16</sup> In line with Mou's classification, Tang, Xu and Tu all take Zhu Xi as one who contributed a great deal to Confucian learning yet missed the point of Confucian morality and spirituality, as formally established in Mencius. Due to a rather unreflective adoption of Kantian conceptions, as pointed out by Zhu Pingci, they hold a strong presupposition of a distinction between knowledge and morality, which leads them to conclude that Zhu Xi has failed to break through the boundary between the two spheres, and to maintain that Zhu Xi's methodology, particularly with regard to his doctrine of *gewu zhizhi* 格物致知 the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge, does not represent the authentic way of sage-making as suggested by Mencius, Lu Xiangshan and Wang Yangming.

Unlike Mou, Tang, Xu and Tu, who share the same research interest in Confucian morality, in their research on Zhu Xi Wing-Tsit Chan 陳榮捷<sup>17</sup> and Chen Lai 陳來<sup>18</sup>

<sup>13</sup> See Zhu Pingci 祝平次, 'Yizhi, Zhishi yu Daode: Lun Zhu Xi Lunlixue de Jige Wenti 意志, 知识与道德: 论朱熹伦理学的几个问题 Will, Knowledge and Morality on a Few Questions in Zhu Xi's Ethics' (2009), 164-77.

<sup>14</sup> Tang Junyi 唐君毅, *Zhongguo Zhaxue Yuanlun-Yuan Dao Pian, Juan 3* 中國哲學原論 - 原道篇卷三 *On Chinese Philosophy-interpretation of the Dao* (1974), 3, 1408-79.

Tang's contribution to the study of Chinese philosophy can hardly be exaggerated. With regard to this research, I am indebted to him for his systematic exploration of the meaning and usage of the philosophical terms throughout the history of classical Chinese, see Tang Junyi 唐君毅, *Zhongguo Zhaxue Yuanlun: Daolun Pian* 中國哲學原論: 導論篇 *On Chinese Philosophy: Introduction* (1986).

<sup>15</sup> Xu Fuguan 徐復觀, *Zhongguo Renxinglun Shi: Xianqin Pian* 中國人性論史: 先秦篇 *History concerning the Development of Chinese Thought on Human Nature: pre-Qin* (1979), 63-102.

<sup>16</sup> Tu Weiming, *Way, Learning and Politics* (1989); *Humanity and Self-Cultivation* (1979).

<sup>17</sup> Most of Wing-Tsit Chan's academic works on Zhu Xi have been translated into Chinese and recently published in mainland China; for instance, his *Zhu Xi Xin Tansuo* 朱子新探索 *New Studies of Master Zhu*, *Zhu Xue Lunji* 朱学论集 *A Collection of Papers on Zhu Xi's Thought*, *Zhu Xi Menren* 朱子门人 *Pupils of Master Zhu* (2007).

<sup>18</sup> Chen Lai 陈来, *Zhu Xi Zhaxue Yanjiu* 朱子哲学研究 *A Study of Zhu Xi's Philosophy* (2008); Chen Lai (ed.), *Zaoqi Daoxue Huayu de Xingcheng yu Yanbian* 早期道学话语的形成与演变 *The Formation and Development of the Early Neo-Confucian Discourse* (2007).

attempt to combine a philological approach with a philosophical perspective. This has resulted in some systematic studies of Zhu Xi's major texts and in-depth analysis of the principal concepts in his work. Daniel K. Gardner's study of Zhu Xi's treatment of *Si Shu* 四書 *The Four Books*, in particular *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning*, make manifest the importance of Zhu Xi's intellectual brilliance to the Song scholarship.<sup>19</sup> The last thirty to forty years have seen a mounting interest in Zhu Xi, and three international conferences on the great thinker, held in 1982, 2008 and 2011, each resulted in a collection of academic papers.<sup>20</sup> Among these papers A. C. Graham's *What is New in Cheng-Chu Theory of Human Nature* gives a real insight into what Zhu Xi means by 'knowing'. Graham particularly stresses the penetrating power of *li* 理 the Principle over *qi* 氣 the cosmic matter, and takes 'knowing' as the innovative element in the theory of human nature promoted by the Cheng-Zhu school.<sup>21</sup> Seen in the light of human nature, the notion of 'knowing' is no longer examined solely from an epistemological stance, but is brought back to the context of the Cheng-Zhu school, and hence acquires moral and even spiritual significance. Graham's analysis of the role of 'knowing' in the thought of the Cheng-Zhu school sheds new light on Zhu Xi's notion of *zhi* 知.

The issue of hermeneutics first came under heated discussion in China in the 1980s, leading to the emergence of a new scholarly field of 'Chinese Hermeneutics'. Contrasting views are expressed on this, as seen in the debate between Wolfgang Kubin and Chungying Cheng.<sup>22</sup> With regard to the hermeneutic rules derived from Zhu Xi's texts, we have the excellent studies conducted by Yang Rubin 楊儒賓, in particular the two papers collected in *Zhongguo Jingdian Quanshi Chuantong-Ruxue Pian* 中國經典詮釋傳統-儒學篇 *The Tradition of Scriptural Exegesis in China – Confucianism*.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> D.K. Gardner, *Chu Hsi and the Ta-Hsueh* (1986); and *The Four Books* (2007).

<sup>20</sup> The three volumes are Wing-tsit Chan (ed.), *Chu Hsi and Neo-Confucianism* (1986); Wang Zhen 王震 (ed.), *Songdai Xin Ruxue de Jingshen Shijie-yi Zhuzi Xue we Zhongxin* 宋代新儒學的精神世界: 以朱子學為中心 *The Spiritual and Intellectual World of Neo-Confucianism in the Song Dynasty with a Focus on the Study of Master Zhu* (2009); Chen Lai 陳來 (ed.), *Zhexue yu Shidai* 哲學與時代 *Philosophy and its Time* (2012).

<sup>21</sup> See A.C. Graham, 'What Was New in the Cheng-Chu Theory of Human Nature' in Wing-tsit Chan (ed.), *Chu Hsi and Neo-Confucianism* (Honolulu, 1986), 138-57.

<sup>22</sup> Cheng-I Tu (ed.), *Interpretation and Intellectual Change* (2005).

<sup>23</sup> Li Minghui 李明輝 (ed.), *Zhongguo Jingdian Quanshi Chuantong-Ruxue Pian* 中國經典詮釋傳統-儒學篇 *The Tradition of Scriptural Exegesis in China – Confucianism* (2002).

In the case of Eckhart, this book is indebted to the following works on medieval studies and on Eckhart. Bernard McGinn's six volumes of *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*<sup>24</sup> depicts the vast landscape of the longstanding spiritual tradition in which Eckhart was raised. For the background knowledge of medieval philosophy and theology, which is essential to understanding Eckhart, this book has recourse mainly to Etienne Gilson's *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*;<sup>25</sup> Norman Kretzmann's *Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy: From the Rediscovery of Aristotle to the Disintegration of Scholasticism 1100-1600*;<sup>26</sup> Ulrich G Leinsle's *Introduction to Scholastic Theology*;<sup>27</sup> and the various introductions to medieval thought authored by B. B. Price,<sup>28</sup> John Marenbon,<sup>29</sup> and David Knowles.<sup>30</sup> With regard to the intellectual figures whose thinking had an evident impact on Eckhart, this book refers mainly to John F. Wippel's study of the metaphysical thought of Thomas Aquinas,<sup>31</sup> Jan A. Aertsen's *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals: the Case of Thomas Aquinas*;<sup>32</sup> Philipp W. Rosemann's account of Peter Lombard;<sup>33</sup> A. Hilary Armstrong's understanding of Plotinus as well as his exposition of the Plotinian and Christian traditions;<sup>34</sup> Gerard O'Daly's analysis of Augustine's philosophy of mind;<sup>35</sup> Herbert A. Davidson's study of Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes' theories of Aristotle's active intellect and of human intellect;<sup>36</sup> and Colette Sirat's introduction to the Jewish philosophy in the Middle Ages, in particular the philosophy of Maimonides.<sup>37</sup>

In Eckhartian literature, of greatest importance has been McGinn's reading of Eckhart as unfolded in his *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, which gives a

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<sup>24</sup> Two volumes in this series are particularly important to our study: I, *The Foundation of Mysticism* (1992); and IV, *The Harvest of Mysticism in Medieval Germany* (2005).

<sup>25</sup> E. Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (1955).

<sup>26</sup> N. Kretzmann, A. Kenny and J. Pinborg (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy* (1982).

<sup>27</sup> U.G. Leinsle, *Introduction to Scholastic Theology* (2010).

<sup>28</sup> B.B. Price, *Medieval Thought* (1992).

<sup>29</sup> J. Marenbon, *Later Medieval Philosophy (1150-1350)* (1987).

<sup>30</sup> D. Knowles, *The Evolution of Medieval Thought* (1963).

<sup>31</sup> J.F. Wippel, *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas* (1984).

<sup>32</sup> J.A. Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals* (1996).

<sup>33</sup> P.W. Rosemann, *Peter Lombard* (2004).

<sup>34</sup> A.H. Armstrong, *The Architecture of the Intelligible Universe in the Philosophy of Plotinus* (1940); *Plotinian and Christian Studies* (1979).

<sup>35</sup> G. O'Daly, *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind* (1987).

<sup>36</sup> H.A. Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes, on Intellect* (1992).

<sup>37</sup> C. Sirat, *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (1985).

picture of Eckhart as a mystic and a scholastic thinker.<sup>38</sup> Similar work has been done by Oliver Davies in his *Meister Eckhart: Mystical Theologian*, albeit that Davies intends to highlight the personal experience of Eckhart that enables his vernacular sermons to be charged with heartfelt power.<sup>39</sup> In both McGinn and Davies, the language of transcendence and immanence prevails. The issue of intellectualism is brought to light in Reiner Schürmann's *Meister Eckhart: Mystic and Philosopher*; by comparing Eckhart with Heidegger, Schürmann puts forward the thesis that in Eckhart the role of intellect is to be revealed through the threefold interplay between God, man and the world.<sup>40</sup> The complexity of Eckhart's thought is largely displayed in Reiner Manstetten's *Esse est Deus*, in which Manstetten attempts to demonstrate how the multi-layers of thought, i.e., the metaphysical, theological, liturgical and spiritual dimensions, are interwoven in Eckhart's texts.<sup>41</sup> Markus Vinzent's study of Eckhart, in particular the two recently published monographs, *The Art of Detachment* and *On the Lord's Prayer*,<sup>42</sup> together with his rediscovery and translation of Eckhart's four new Parisian Questions,<sup>43</sup> makes clear the kind of systematic thinking to be found in Eckhart, and the sense in which Eckhart's thinking possesses the power to redefine or even undermine the traditional ways of doing theology. The genre of scholastic *quaestio* is explored in Palémon Glorieux's *La littérature quodlibétique de 1260 à 1320*,<sup>44</sup> while a detailed expounding of Eckhart's apophatic theology is provided in V. Lossky's *Théologie négative et connaissance de Dieu chez Maître Eckhart*.<sup>45</sup>

Although no comparison has been done between Zhu Xi and Eckhart, we have a number of comparative studies with reference to one or other of these thinkers, for instance, John H. Berthrong's *Concerning Creativity: A Comparison of Chu Hsi, Whitehead, and Neville*.<sup>46</sup> Great attempts have been made to compare Zhu Xi and

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<sup>38</sup> B. McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart* (2001).

<sup>39</sup> O. Davies, *Meister Eckhart* (1991).

<sup>40</sup> R. Schürmann, *Meister Eckhart* (1978).

<sup>41</sup> R. Manstetten, *Esse est Deus* (1993).

<sup>42</sup> M. Vinzent, *The Art of Detachment* (2011); *id.*, *Meister Eckhart, On the Lord's Prayer* (2012).

<sup>43</sup> M. Vinzent, 'Questions on the Attributes (of God): Four Rediscovered Parisian Questions of Meister Eckhart', *Journal of Theological Studies*, 63, (2012), 156-86.

<sup>44</sup> P. Glorieux, *La littérature quodlibétique de 1260 à 1320* (1925).

<sup>45</sup> V. Lossky, *Théologie négative et connaissance de Dieu chez Maître Eckhart* (1960).

<sup>46</sup> J. Berthrong, *Concerning Creativity* (1997).



Thomas Aquinas, both in Chinese<sup>47</sup> and in English.<sup>48</sup> As for studies that intend to contribute to inter-religious dialogue, we have Rudolf Otto's *Mysticism East and West*,<sup>49</sup> and D. T. Suzuki's *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist*.<sup>50</sup>

None of the aforementioned works touch on the concept of intellect in Zhu Xi, although studies of Eckhart cannot avoid his notion of intellect. The depth of an idea can become clearer once it is compared with another tradition; however, in both Suzuki and Otto, the textual study is inadequate, and arguably an oversimplification. By taking the hermeneutical framework fully into consideration, this research aims to cover different literary forms and to cross-read texts, so that the development of the idea in it will become lively and concrete. A comparison based on textual study makes it clear that in both Zhu Xi and Eckhart, the hermeneutical, intellectual and spiritual dimensions are closely bound together, and the three are often fused into one. As the first ever comparative study between Zhu Xi and Meister Eckhart, this book aims to find the common ground beneath the seeming contrast between the two great thinkers, using these exemplars to bridge the different intellectual traditions on a specific point, which will enhance the reception of Zhu Xi in Christian tradition as well as the reception of Eckhart in the Confucian world. Since the focus of this book is on intellect and the kind of intellectualism expressed in Zhu Xi and Eckhart, it will offer two intellectual profiles, which will underline the resemblance between Zhu Xi's intellectual spirituality and Eckhart's intellectual mysticism. Such is the potential contribution this book intends to make.

Following the formula of a comparative study, this book comprises three chapters. Chapter 1 deals with Zhu Xi's hermeneutical framework for his understanding of the human intellect. In three sections it addresses, first, how Zhu Xi 'the editor' edits the text of *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning*; second, how Zhu Xi 'the commentator' weaves his philosophical ideas into the text of *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning* through commentary writing; and third, how Zhu Xi 'the philosopher' formulates a systematic elucidation of his thinking in the form of Q&A. Through the three inter-related sections we can find in Zhu Xi a persistent stress on the importance of knowing and his attempt

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<sup>47</sup> Li Jianqiu 黎建球, *Zhu Xi yu Duomasi Xingshang Sixiang de Bijiao* 朱熹與多馬斯形上思想的比較 *A Comparison between Zhu Xi's Metaphysical Thinking and that of Thomas Aquinas* (1977).

<sup>48</sup> J.J. Griffin, *Caritas and Ren* (1988).

<sup>49</sup> R. Otto, *Mysticism East and West* (1970).

<sup>50</sup> D.T. Suzuki, *Mysticism* (1957).

to establish an ontological and epistemological ground for Confucian morality and spirituality in terms of self-realisation.

With a structure similar to Chapter 1, Chapter 2 addresses the hermeneutical framework for Eckhart's notion of the human intellect. Once again, the chapter includes three sections: first, how Eckhart 'the philosopher' spells out his revolutionary thinking of intellect in the form of *quaestio*; second, how Eckhart 'the theologian' addresses the priority of knowing through extensive biblical commentaries; and third, how Eckhart 'the friar' manages to communicate his profound philosophical and theological thinking by delivering sermons to the public, in both scholastic Latin and the vernacular Middle High German.

Based on a systematic study of the two thinkers as presented in Chapters 1 and 2, Chapter 3 will form a comparison between Zhu Xi and Eckhart with a focus on their thinking concerning the human intellect and the relevant hermeneutical considerations expressed by both scholars.

The translation of Zhu Xi's works in this study is mostly that of the author; where that is not the case the translator's name will be given. The treatment of the fundamental concepts in Zhu Xi mainly follows Wing-Tsit Chan's translation as seen in his *Source Book*.<sup>51</sup> In line with Chan, in this study *li* 理 will be translated as Principle, *xin* 心 as mind, and *yi* 意 as will, on the grounds of the prevailing role of philosophical thinking in the Song, especially in the Cheng-Zhu School. The Song masters' interest in philosophical discussion is undoubtedly a testimony to the enduring influence that Zen Buddhism exerted on the theoretical reconstruction of Confucianism in the Song. Given the Neo-Confucian masters' affinity with Zen, the translation of their work will naturally take into account the meaning of the same term in the context of Zen, which explains why 'mind', rather than 'mind-heart' is to be chosen as the translation of *xin* 心. Similarly 'Principle' rather than 'pattern' or 'coherence' will be treated as the equivalent of *Li* 理 in English, in order to convey the metaphysical or ontological implications these Neo-Confucian terminologies may have.<sup>52</sup> It is the author's idea to translate Zhu Xi's *zhi* 知 as intellect, which will be explained at length in the first chapter.

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<sup>51</sup> See Wing-Tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (1969), 588-653.

<sup>52</sup> In addition to 'principle', 'pattern' and 'coherence', there are many other options for *Li*, such as 'form' and 'order'. Given the fundamental differences between the two linguistic systems and the two intellectual traditions, it is obvious that no one will ever find a perfect match for *Li* in English, a translator/author's choice of word is determined by his or her interpretation of the source text, and in

Considering the sense of mission shared by the Song masters, which involves the task to rehabilitate the cultural and spiritual identity of the Confucian literati at that time, this book uses the word ‘scripture’ rather than ‘classic’ when alluding to the fundamental texts that have shaped the Confucian tradition and have been widely treated as the manifestation of the *Dao* 道 Way through the words and lives of the ancient sages. Hence, scripture stands for something sacred and embodies the universal and eternal truth whose validity is not affected by the fluctuation of social and cultural circumstances. The role of scripture was particularly addressed by the Neo-Confucian masters when they committed themselves to resuming the Confucian spiritual identity and reconstructing the Confucian intellectual tradition. Such spiritual and intellectual commitment is also entangled with a profound political or social concern. The subtle difference between the scriptural texts and the classical texts became an issue in the transmission of the divine lineage within Confucian tradition. A classical text may be an historical document or a literary work that does not lead directly to a spiritual or religious identity; only a scriptural text holds the key to one’s spiritual or religious identity, due to its divine origin and sacred nature. Partly for that reason, Zhu Xi gives primacy to *Si Shu* 四書 *The Four Books*, which enjoy a higher status than *Wu Jing* 五經 *The Five Classics*. That also explains why *du shu fa* 讀書法 is preferably translated as ‘Method of Scriptural Reading’ rather than ‘Method of Reading’, as in the context of Zhu Xi it mainly applies to scriptural reading.

This book uses traditional Chinese characters and Pinyin in the main text; however, some simplified Chinese characters and Wade-Giles may be found in the footnotes if they are so printed in the original texts.

With regard to English translations of Eckhart, this study relies on Edmund Colledge, Oliver Davies, Frank Tobin and Maurice O’C Walshe for their translation of Eckhart’s German works. For Eckhart’s scholastic Latin works, the book follows the translations offered by Bernard McGinn, Armand A. Maurer and Markus Vinzent. The footnotes will give the place of the relevant English translation alongside its place in the German Works (DW) or the Latin Works (LW) if that passage has been translated into English.

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other words, one’s translation is shaped by the respective interpretation. In that sense translation has raised new questions and also opened up more avenues for the study of Chinese thought in the West. This issue has been particularly addressed by Brook Ziporyn in two monographs. See Brook Ziporyn, *Ironies of Oneness and Difference: Coherence in Early Chinese Thought; Prolegomena to the Study of Li* (2012); id., *Beyond Oneness and Difference: Li and Coherence in Chinese Buddhist Thought and its Antecedents* (2013).

Three appendices are attached to the main text. Appendix 1 is the table of the four versions of *The Great Learning*; Appendix 2 is a Chinese-English glossary giving a list of the Chinese terms relevant to this book; Appendix 3 is the author's translation of Zhu Xi's *Q&A concerning The Great Learning*, which covers all the passages quoted from in this book.

I am deeply indebted to my teachers and friends, without whose continuous support I would have lost my confidence and probably abandoned this project.

My thanks go first to my PhD supervisor Prof. Markus Vinzent. The past four years have been a process of intensive learning under his supervision, and the training I have received from him will continue to have an impact on my study in the future. I can recall all the meetings we had in the British Library or in his office, when we sat down and went through my immature work line-by-line. He checked every single word of my writing, picking up all the possible mistakes ranging from grammatical errors to incoherence in my argument and mistakes in my understanding of Eckhart. Sometimes I simply came to him with question upon question concerning the background knowledge of Eckhart, philosophical or theological enquiries, ranging from Aristotle or Plotinus to Hegel, even to the modern theory of hermeneutics. I am amazed by the fact that to all my ridiculously unlimited questioning, his answers were always clear. I cannot imagine how much more time I would have needed to solve these puzzles in my head without the navigation of an erudite supervisor like Markus. I always find it a pleasure to listen to his personal view, especially when it sounds as provocative and daring as that of Eckhart. The four years I have spent under his supervision have led me into the world of medieval theology, allowing me a glimpse of the spiritual and intellectual splendour of that age.

I am indebted to Prof. Xinzhong Yao at King's College London for my research on Zhu Xi. In addition to helping me with my thesis, he also kindly allowed me to participate in lecturing the undergraduate courses on Confucian Ethics and Chinese Religion, which has broadened my view of Confucian tradition in general terms, and in particular has deepened my understanding of the methodology advocated by the modern New-Confucian scholars from Mou Zongsan to Tu Weiming.

I owe a huge thank you to Prof. Edmond Tang at the University of Birmingham. Without his continuous support and encouragement, I would not have had the confidence to take up this research in the first place. He also kindly let me have access to the Chinese books he has collected over decades. This resource treasure spared me

the pain of carrying home the essential reference books from the SOAS library, and in the course of writing my thesis I enjoyed the freedom to look up a specific chapter or page whenever I needed to.

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I am grateful to all my fellow PhD students for the fascinating discussions and exchange of ideas at postgraduate seminars. In particular I would like to thank Chris Wojtulewicz, whose thesis is on Eckhart's thought of creation, and Yen-yi Lee, who majored in Chinese literature and is now Dr Lee in theology. Chris took the trouble to go through the whole thesis with a focus on grammar and style, while Yen-yi read the first chapter and we had long conversations at Birmingham with regard to the literature on Zhu Xi.

Finally, a few personal words to my families in China and the UK. I will always be grateful to my parents for allowing me to take up the study of philosophy against their wishes when I was eighteen. I also thank my son Aaron and my husband Jin for their love and support. Despite all the ups and downs I encountered over the past four years, the company of Jin and Aaron made this research an enjoyable process. Therefore, I affectionately dedicate this book to Aaron and Jin.

## Chapter 1 The Notion of *zhi* 知 and Intellectualism as Unfolded in Zhu Xi's Hermeneutical Framework

Like Confucian scholars today, who cannot escape the prevalence of philosophical terminologies borrowed from the West, Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200) could not avoid non-Confucian concepts – mainly the Daoist and Buddhist categories – when committing to the Neo-Confucian project, the reconstruction of Confucian tradition. That theoretical attempt at a comprehensive reconstruction of Confucianism can be traced back to the late Tang 唐 (618-907)<sup>53</sup> scholars Han Yu 韓愈 (768-824) and Li Ao 李翱 (774-836), in whom we see the aspiration to rehabilitate the orthodox status of Confucianism, and who, more importantly, both started to compose philosophical treatises in order to shed new light on fundamental Confucian concepts such as *Dao* 道 Way and *xing* 性 nature.<sup>54</sup> A genuine revival of Confucian education and scriptural learning occurred in the early Song 宋 (960-1279), which is collectively represented by Sun Fu 孫復 (992-1057), Hu Yuan 胡瑗 (993-1059), Shi Jie 石介 (1005-1045) and Fan Zhongyan 范仲淹 (989-1052). Under this academic climate emerged the five eminent Confucian masters in the Northern Song (960-1127): Zhang Zai 張載 (1020-1078), Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤 (1017-1073), Shao Yong 邵雍 (1011-1077), and the Cheng brothers Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032-1085) and Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033-1107).<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> It is still open to question whether the origin of the Neo-Confucian movement might be found in the work of Wang Tong 王通 (584-617), who lived in the period of the Sui dynasty 隋 (581-618). This controversial question has been addressed by both Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming. In conversing with his pupils Zhu Xi gives a critical comment on Wang Tong's *Zhong Shuo* 中說 *On Confucian Doctrine*, noting that the authorship of this book cannot be ascribed to Wang. See ZZYL, Juan 137 in ZZQS, 18,4251-5. Unlike Zhu Xi, Wang Yangming pays more attention to the significance of *Zhong Shuo* 中說 *On Confucian Doctrine*; in his *Chuan Xi Lu* 傳習錄 *Instructions for Practical Living* Wang Yangming compares Han Yu 韓愈 (768-824) with Wang Tong 王通 (584-617), and openly plays down the importance of Han Yu in Confucian history. From Wang Yangming's perspective Han Yu is only a genius in literature, whereas Wang Tong as a worthy Confucian has made a far greater contribution to reveal *Dao* 道 Way. See Wing-tsit Chan 陳榮捷, *Wang Yangming Chuan Xi Lu Xiangzhu Jiping* 王陽明《傳習錄》詳註集評 *Detailed Commentary and Collective Remarks on Wang Yangming's Instructions for Practical Living* (2009), 26-9, 138-40.

<sup>54</sup> The pioneer spirit of Han Yu and Li Ao is best revealed through two philosophical treatises: Han Yu's 韓愈 'Yuan Dao 原道 An Inquiry on the Way' and Li Ao's 李翱 'Fu Xing Shu 復性書 The Recovery of the Nature'; both see a new reading of Confucian scriptures characterised by a hybrid of Buddhist terminologies with Confucian doctrines.

<sup>55</sup> For a detailed genealogy of the Song Confucian masters, see Quan Zuwang 全祖望, 'Song Yuan Ru Xue An Xulu 宋元儒學案序錄 Preface to Song-Yuan Confucian Anthology', in Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 and Quan Zuwang 全祖望 (eds.), *Song Yuan Xue An 宋元學案 Song-Yuan Confucian Anthology* (1986), 1,1-18.

It was the Cheng brothers' advocating of *tian li* 天理 the Heavenly Principle that finally clarified the direction of the Song scholarly tradition,<sup>56</sup> and the theoretical accomplishment of the Cheng brothers, especially that of Cheng Yi, formed the groundwork for Zhu Xi's thinking. Unlike his predecessors, who made their proclamations without systematically backing these up by scriptures, Zhu Xi weaved his philosophical thinking into scriptural texts by writing commentaries on them.

In Zhu Xi's work the philosophical categories are always intertwined with scriptures, and often serve as the hermeneutical keys to a creative understanding of the transmitted texts. It might not be too far from the truth to describe Zhu Xi's thinking as systematic; however this could be misleading if we overlook his fundamental role as an authoritative commentator and treat him solely as a systematic philosopher. The insufficiency of such a philosophical approach will become strikingly evident once we take into account the expression of his thought.

It is remarkable that beneath Zhu Xi's philosophical ideas lies the scriptural ground. That kind of purely philosophical exposition of an abstract concept which bears no scriptural reference seems to be alien to Zhu Xi, and probably to many other Confucian thinkers. This issue has been addressed by Feng Youlan 馮友蘭 (1895-1990), who claims that from Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (179-104 B.C.) onwards, the majority of Confucian authors, no matter how innovative a theory is to be proposed, resort to scriptural learning and attempt to substantiate their own ideas with scriptural proof, since only in this way will a theory be generally accepted.<sup>57</sup> Despite all the controversies surrounding Feng's claim, his judgement certainly gives some insight into the characteristics of Zhu Xi's thought. Indeed, Zhu Xi hardly ever conducts philosophical speculation without considering its scriptural support; the philosophical ideas in his work are almost exclusively formulated through a dialogue with Confucian scriptures. It will be very hard, if not impossible, to grasp the depth and complexity of Zhu Xi's thought without

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<sup>56</sup> Cheng Hao openly proclaimed his own attainment of the Heavenly Principle, 'although some parts of my thought are handed down by the predecessors, the two words "Heavenly Principle" are derived from my own experience (吾學雖有所受, "天理"二字卻是自家體貼出來)'. See 'Henan Chengshi Waishu 河南程氏外書 External Works of the Chengs', *Juan 12, Er Cheng Ji 二程集 Works of the Two Chengs* (1981), 1,424.

<sup>57</sup> The validity of Feng Youlan's observation is still open to discussion, thus constituting another huge topic that cannot be dealt with in this research. Based on his professional training in Western philosophy, Feng's perspective provides us with some insights into the hermeneutical dimension of Confucian scholarship. He divides the history of Chinese intellectual tradition into two main stages: the age of *Zi Xue* 子學 (the thought of the masters) beginning with Confucius (551-479 B.C.) and ending with King Huainan 淮南王 (179-122 B.C.), and the age of *Jing Xue* 經學 scriptural learning, from Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (179-104 B.C.) to Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858-1927). For details, see Feng Youlan 馮友蘭, *Zhongguo Zhexueshi 中國哲學史 History of Chinese Philosophy* (1992), 1,370.

a close scrutiny of the hermeneutical framework within which his philosophical thinking is so splendidly unfolded.

Throughout the history of Confucianism the method of philosophising has varied. In the Confucian context there seem to be no philosophical glossaries that allow concepts originated from Buddhism or Taoism to be universally applied to the extent that the Aristotelian concepts have been adopted in the context of Christian theology. Taking into account the disputable role played by philosophical speculation in the proceedings of Confucianism as a tradition of thought, the level of difficulty and complexity involved in Zhu Xi's treatment of Confucian scriptures is multiplied. Zhu Xi appropriates a wide range of Daoist and Buddhist philosophical categories, and uses them as the hermeneutical key to a philosophical reading of Confucian scriptures. On the other hand, a great deal of preparation has been done to ensure that all the exotic philosophical concepts are subject to the Confucian values and suitable to be merged into the scriptural texts, so that the original Daoist or Buddhist colour will fade into the background, and those borrowed ideas finally acquire a Confucian expression.<sup>58</sup> Daniel K Gardner's research depicts an overall account of the Song Confucian scholarship. He rightly points out that at least three approaches have been generally adopted by the Song Confucian scholars, namely the critical, the programmatic and the philosophical. Zhu Xi's main interest undoubtedly falls into the last category.<sup>59</sup>

Indeed, Zhu Xi assigns himself an unprecedentedly demanding task: to provide a coherent and systematic philosophical interpretation of the principal Confucian scriptures. Such a massive academic assignment generally entails a twofold operation, namely compiling and interpreting scriptures, both of which require the intellectual capacity for systematic thinking which enables personal thought to run through the scriptural texts while at the same time rising above them. This task inevitably demands from the author an architectonic ability that will be lacking in an ordinary commentator

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<sup>58</sup> Zhu Xi's Commentaries came in for severe criticism during the Qing Dynasty, when the paradigm of scholarship radically shifted, with the philosophical aspirations shared by the Song Confucian scholars gradually being replaced by fervent interest in philology. Zhu Xi's thought was mostly rejected due to its impurity, in the sense that his interpretation is tainted with Buddhist and Daoist categories. Nevertheless, Zhu Xi's approach has been deeply appreciated by many prominent Confucian scholars in the modern era of China; for example, the renowned historian Cheng Yinke 陈寅恪 expresses his sympathetic understanding of the Song Confucian masters' work, in particular Zhu Xi's commentaries on Confucian scriptures. See Wu Xuezhao 吴学昭, *Wu Mi yu Chen Yinke* 吴宓与陈寅恪 *Wu Mi and Chen Yinke* (1992), 9-11.

<sup>59</sup> For the development of a schematisation of the Confucian classical studies in the Song Dynasty, see D.K. Gardner, *Chu Hsi and the Ta-hsueh* (1986), 9-16.



equipped only with textual knowledge. Certainly one must acquire a high level of familiarity with scriptures and a mastery of language before embarking upon this academic enterprise, but these are only the basic requirements. It takes much more to engage in compiling and interpreting a whole set of Confucian scriptures. In other words, the traditional training in language and textual scholarship will not suffice. It is the grand vision, the original thinking and the faith in scriptures that really count. And it is here that Zhu Xi's intellectual brilliance and his architectonic strength gain full display. This may also explain why it is that we see in Zhu Xi, more clearly than in any other Confucian master, a sustained striving for, and commitment to, order, structure, system and logic.

In comparison with the preceding masters in the Northern Song 北宋 (960-1127) and with most of his contemporaries, Zhu Xi undoubtedly gives more thought to the structure of a text, rather than focusing only on the content. His work noticeably indicates an awareness of the fundamental importance of logical reasoning and structuring in both understanding and interpreting scriptures.<sup>60</sup> It is this kind of awareness that drives Zhu Xi to scrutinise the implicit structure of a scriptural text and also to attempt to systematise the Confucian teachings and values conveyed through the ancient texts. The effort in structuring and systematising a transmitted text never stands alone; it is always accompanied by an unconventional vision or perspective which allows new light to be shed upon the old text. And these unconventional ideas are often derived from philosophical speculation. In Zhu Xi, this unconventional element is obviously his doctrine of *li* 理 the Principle.

It is worth noting that one does not need to affiliate with a certain tradition in order to conduct philosophical thinking; a philosophical insight can be shared by people of diverse backgrounds and be universally applied to various traditions. In other words, philosophical truth is bound to grow out of a specific linguistic framework, while lending itself to a wider application. But scripture has a more complex role to play in the development of a tradition. A scripture, insofar as it is the fundamental text of a certain tradition, usually demonstrates the uniqueness of that tradition as well as endorsing some doctrines that can be shared by all, for the uniqueness of a scriptural text concerns the spiritual or religious identity of those who have been brought up in it.

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<sup>60</sup> This is exemplified particularly by the arguments presented in his *Da Xue Huo Wen* 大學或問 *Questions and Answers concerning The Great Learning*, as will be discussed below.

Ironically, the abstract philosophical terms borrowed from other traditions serve the purpose of asserting the uniqueness of Confucianism intellectually and spiritually. Zhu Xi's *Sishu Zhangju Jizhu* 四書章句集註 *Commentaries on the Four Books* undoubtedly represents his intellectual accomplishment as a commentator. Given the ultimate goal of the Neo-Confucian movement and the social context in which Zhu Xi's *Commentaries* emerged, we cannot deny that his commentary writing does entail a spiritual dimension. As the historical study of Yu Yingshi 余英時 has revealed that the competitions between Confucian masters and Buddhist monks in the Song Dynasty actually occurred in the realm that is beyond this world, what they aimed for is not political or social privileges, but rather spiritual superiority.<sup>61</sup> A similar view is expressed by Tu Weiming 杜維明, who depicts the Neo-Confucian movement as “a long and strenuous process of searching for a new spiritual identity following the decline of Confucian thinking over a period of centuries.”<sup>62</sup> Seen in this light Zhu Xi's completion of this masterpiece cannot be deemed an intellectual achievement which is independent from the Neo-Confucians' collective efforts in striving for a new spiritual identity. To Zhu Xi and his contemporaries, his *Sishu Zhangju Jizhu* 四書章句集註 *Commentaries on The Four Books* is no less than a well structured and systematically interpreted Confucian *sutra*, which contains the wisdom of the Confucian sages whose lives and words are the embodiment of *Dao* 道 Way. When Zhu Xi openly proclaims the divine origin<sup>63</sup> of *Sishu* 四書 *The Four Books* and regards these texts as sacred, the spiritual and religious implications of his *Sishu Zhangju Jizhu* 四書章句集註 *Commentaries on The Four Books* also become self-evident. Although they appeared as Zhu Xi's personal intellectual output, in the Neo-Confucian context this series of *Commentaries* automatically acquire a peculiar spiritual significance. Hence the hermeneutical, the intellectual and the spiritual dimensions are fused into one in Zhu Xi's *Commentaries*.

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<sup>61</sup> For a detailed survey of the historical development of the Neo-Confucian movement, see Ying-shih Yu, 'Intellectual Breakthroughs in the T'ang-Sung Transition', in Willard J. Peterson, Andrew H. Plaks and Ying-shih Yu (eds.), *The Power of Culture* (Hong Kong, 1994), 158-71. [The conventions with transcription of Chinese names have changed over the last few decades, it is now commonly accepted that the author's name is given in Pinyin and no hyphen between the two characters of the first name, for instance, 'Yu Yingshi' instead of 'Yu Ying-shi', 'Wang Yangming' instead of 'Wang Yang-ming'.]

<sup>62</sup> See Tu Wei-ming, *Humanity and Self-Cultivation* (1979), 83-101.

<sup>63</sup> This line of thought is clearly expressed in Zhu Xi's 'Da Xue Zhangju Xu 大學章句序 Preface to The Great Learning' and 'Zhong Yong Zhangju Xu 中庸章句序 Preface to The Doctrine of the Mean', in *Sishu Zhangju Jizhu* 四書章句集註 *Commentaries on the Four Books* (1983), 1, 14.

Clearly Zhu Xi concerns himself more with the philosophical ideas than with the historical facts or literary vocabulary, grammar and rhetoric, and it is the ideas that constitute the core of his work, as explicitly instanced by his *Da Xue Zhangju* 大學章句 *Commentary on The Great Learning*. It is by means of interpreting a crucial scriptural phrase *gewu zhizhi* 格物致知 the investigation of things and extension of knowledge that Zhu Xi unfolds his insights into a hidden line of Confucian tradition which, he believes, has long been overlooked by previous commentators and many contemporary Confucian scholars. His dialogue with this scripture opens up a new approach to scriptural learning and self-cultivation. Indeed, such is the importance of *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning* that he finds it necessary to insert into the the original text a *Bu Zhuan* 補傳 *Supplement* to the section of *gewu zhizhi* 格物致知 the investigation of things and extension of knowledge, so as to make it complete in terms of structure and meaning. This unconventional way of exegetical practice allows Zhu Xi's personal thought to partake of the character of the scriptural text. This *little* change represents the crux of his entire hermeneutical project, even possessing the power to rethink or rewrite the Confucian tradition; evidently in this *little* change consists the originality of his thinking.<sup>64</sup>

The phrase 'gewu zhizhi 格物致知' may sound familiar to many Confucian adherents, as it had existed in the text of *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning* for centuries before Zhu Xi's discovery of its vital importance to the reconstruction of Confucianism. Zhu Xi's contribution lies mainly in formulating a systematic interpretation of this phrase in the form of *Supplement*, as a result 'zhi 知 knowing'<sup>65</sup> gains a central role in Confucian way of self-cultivation, and becomes an essential element in Confucian morality and spirituality. In other words, 'zhi 知 knowing' starts to assume moral (political) and spiritual significance, and the epistemological implication of *zhi* 知 is relatively less important in Zhu Xi's thought. Despite a persistent emphasis on *zhi* 知 knowing, Zhu Xi categorically puts *ren* 仁 humaneness in front of *zhi* 知 knowing,<sup>66</sup> likewise he subordinates the issue of intellectual conduct to the Confucian theme of moral

<sup>64</sup> A.C. Graham maintains that the innovative element of Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi's theory of human nature lies in their notion of 'knowing'. See A.C. Graham, 'What Was New in the Cheng-Chu Theory of Human Nature' (1986), 138-57.

<sup>65</sup> *zhi* 知 can be a verb or a noun, depending on the context in which it appears.

<sup>66</sup> Zhu Xi, ZZYL, Juan 32: '知對仁言，則仁是體，知是用。只就知言，則知又自有體，用。淳錄' ZZQS, 15,1163.

cultivation<sup>67</sup> and the pursuit of spiritual maturity throughout his exegeses, in the sense that knowing leads to moral action and thinking paves the way for sagehood. Philosophically speaking the concept of *zhi* 知 knowing stands at a relatively lower level than that of *li* 理 Principle, of *xin* 心 mind, of *xing* 性 nature and of *ming* 命 mandate, in Zhu Xi *zhi* 知 knowing is defined as a major function of *xin* 心 mind which is deemed the platform where the practice of self-cultivation is to be carried out.<sup>68</sup> Here we are confronted with the difficulty that the distinction, which we may take for granted, between facts and values or between epistemology and morality, does not necessarily concern a Neo-Confucian master like Zhu Xi. Although what Zhu Xi means by *zhi* 知 knowing may refer to the pursuit of structure and order, and also associates with logical reasoning and analytical expression, it is not fitting to read too much epistemological meaning into Zhu Xi's notion of *zhi* 知 knowing, for *zhi* 知 knowing in Confucian context does not have an end in itself, it often refers to one's experiential awareness of one's own existence as well as the existence of the world,<sup>69</sup> in Zhu Xi's case *zhi* 知 knowing serves as the means by which the meaning of *li* 理 Principle, the power of *xin* 心 mind, the greatness of *xing* 性 human nature and the secret of *tian ming* 天命 the heavenly mandate of are to be brought to light.<sup>70</sup>

In relation to *ren* 仁 humaneness, *li* 理 Principle, *xin* 心 mind, *xing* 性 nature and *ming* 命 mandate, *zhi* 知 knowing ought to be understood in terms of *yong* 用 function; whereas standing alone, *zhi* 知 knowing can have its own *ti* 體 substance and *yong* 用

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<sup>67</sup> With regard to the relation of morality to knowledge in Zhu Xi, see Yu Ying-shi, 'Morality and Knowledge in Chu Hsi's Philosophical System', in Wing-tsit Chan (ed.), *Chu Hsi and Neo-Confucianism* (Honolulu, 1986), 228-54.

<sup>68</sup> Zhu Xi, *ZZYL*, *Juan* 5: '心是做工夫处。端蒙錄' *ZZQS*, 14,230.

<sup>69</sup> See Zhu Pingci 祝平次, 'Yizhi, Zhishi yu Daode: Lun Zhu Xi Lunlixue de Jige Wenti 意志, 知识与道德: 论朱熹伦理学的几个问题 Will, Knowledge and Morality: on a Few Questions in Zhu Xi's Ethics', in Wang Zhen 王震 (ed.), *Songdai Xin Ruxue de Jingshen Shijie-yi Zhuzi Xue we Zhongxin* 宋代新儒学的精神世界: 以朱子学为中心 *The Spiritual and Intellectual World of Neo-Confucianism in the Song Dynasty-with a focus on the study of Master Zhu* (2009), 171.

<sup>70</sup> Zhu Xi, *ZZYL*, *Juan* 14: '大學須自格物入, 格物從敬入最好。只敬, 便能格物。敬是個瑩徹底物事。今人卻塊坐了, 相似昏倦, 要須提撕著。提撕便敬; 昏倦便是肆, 肆便不敬。德明錄' *ZZQS*, 14,443.

*Ibid.* *Juan* 15: '格物、致知, 是極粗底事; "天命之謂性", 是極精底事。但致知、格物, 便是那 "天命之謂性" 底事。下等事, 便是上等工夫。義剛錄' *ZZQS*, 14,475.

In line with Cheng Yi, Zhu Xi interprets *gewu* 格物 the investigation of things as *qiongli* 窮理 probing the Principle, *zhizhi* 致知 the extension of knowledge is taken in the sense of extending what one has known to what is yet to be known, which has its end in illuminating the substance and function of *xin* 心 mind. Cheng Yi also identifies *qiongli* 窮理 probing the Principle with *jinxing* 尽性 realising the potential in one's nature and *zhiming* 至命 attaining the heavenly mandate; he particularly highlights the point that these three should be treated as one, and can be accomplished at the same time. See Cheng Yi, 'Henan Chengshi Yishu 河南程氏遺書 Posthumous Work of the Two Cheng Masters', *Juan* 18, *Er Cheng Ji* 二程集 *Works of the Two Chengs* (1981), 1,193.

function as Zhu Xi claims. The doctrine of *ti-yong* 體用 substance-function firstly appeared in Wang Bi 王弼(226—249)’s *Laozi Zhu* 老子注 *Commentary on Laozi* chapter 38, later on was widely adopted by Buddhism. As a philosophical terminology *ti-yong* 體用 substance-function has been employed in both Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi’s works. Cheng Yi applies it to his theory of *li yi fen shu* 理一分殊 one Principle with diverse manifestations. It gains even a wider application in Zhu Xi without being clearly redefined. Wing-tsit Chan on the basis of his extensive study of Zhu Xi summarises the meaning of *ti-yong* 體用 substance-function into four: 1) a thing and its function, for instance, ear and hearing; 2) the source or origin from which a thing is derived, for instance, *ren* 仁 humaneness and *ai* 愛 love; 3) the two sides of one thing, for instance, *xing* 性 nature and *qing* 情 feeling represent *ti* 體 the substance and *yong* 用 function of *xin* 心 mind; 4) the cause or reasons for something to be so, for instance *ren* 仁 humaneness rooted in human nature as *ti* 體 the substance and the sympathy one feels for others as *yong* 用 function.<sup>71</sup>

Having this clarified, we have to ask the question - what does Zhu Xi mean by the substance and function of *zhi* 知 knowing? Is he trying to highlight the autonomy of knowing or knowledge by addressing the substance of *zhi* 知? To answer this question, it is necessary to go back to the text of *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning* where *gewu zhizhi* 格物致知 the investigation of things and extension of knowledge is followed by *chengyi* 誠意 the sincerity of the will and *zhengxin* 正心 the rectification of the mind. Since *zhengxin* 正心 the rectification of the mind pertains to modifying the feelings such as wrath, fear, fondness and worries aroused in an individual’s mind, it becomes explicit that the three consecutive steps *zhizhi* 致知, *chengyi* 誠意 and *zhengxin* are dealing with the three functions of *xin* 心 mind, namely *zhi* 知 knowing, *yi* 意 willing and *qing* 情 feeling<sup>72</sup> which in turn, represent the intellect, the will and the sentiments in us. In *Yu Lei* 語類 *Conversations* Zhu Xi expounds at length in what sense *xin* 心 mind is deemed *ti* 體 the substance from which arise *zhi* 知 knowing, *yi* 意 willing and *qing* 情 feeling.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>71</sup> See Wing-tsit Chan 陈荣捷, *Zhu Xue Lunji* 朱学论集 *Collection of Papers on Zhu Xi* (2007), 55-60.

<sup>72</sup> Zhu Xi explains that the word *qing* 情 covers such a broad domain that the activity of will can be included in it. In that sense what he means by *qing* 情 overarches both sentiment and will: so long as a certain kind of feeling is aroused, the activity of will becomes involved. See ZZYL, Juan 5: ‘情又是意底骨子。志與意都屬情，情字較大。偶錄’ ZZQS, 14,232.

<sup>73</sup> Zhu Xi, ZZYL, Juan 15: ‘致知、誠意、正心，知與意皆從心出來。端蒙錄’ ZZQS, 14,489.

*Ibid.* Juan 5: ‘性、情、心，惟孟子橫渠說得好。仁是性，惻隱是情，須從心上發出來。蓋卿錄’ ZZQS, 14,229.

Obviously in relation to *yi* 意 willing and *qing* 情 feeling, *zhi* 知 has its own substance and function, and together they form the major functions of *xin* 心 mind.

Given the context in which Zhu Xi notion of *zhi* 知 appears, we cannot come to the conclusion that a stress on the autonomy of knowing or knowledge is seen in Zhu Xi, simply because he puts knowing in front of willing and feeling. What Zhu Xi means by *zhi* 知 is fundamentally a great function of *xin* 心 mind, peculiar to *xin* 心 mind is this extremely subtle and miraculous faculty of knowing which is called *xuling zhijue* 虛靈知覺 in his *Zhong Yong Zhangju* 中庸章句 *Commentary on The Doctrine of the Mean*,<sup>74</sup> and *ren zhi shenming* 人之神明 in his *Mengzi Jizhu* 孟子集註 *Commentary on The Book of Mencius*.<sup>75</sup> Different from these two texts, in his *Da Xue Zhangju* 大學章句 *Commentary on The Great Learning* Zhu Xi explicitly establishes a correspondence between *xin zhi zhi* 心之知 the knowing faculty of the mind and *wu zhi li* 物之理 the Principle of things, his work surrounding *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning* sees a systematic philosophical expression of Zhu Xi's notion of *zhi* 知.

Thanks to Mou Zongsan's influence,<sup>76</sup> a large proportion of the previous interpretation of Zhu Xi's doctrine of '*gewu zhizhi* 格物致知' draws heavily on the Kantian concepts, even Yu Yingshi's analysis in this respect is not exempt from the kind of dichotomy between epistemology and morality.<sup>77</sup> Nonetheless a close examination of the context makes it necessary to move away from the epistemological perspective, because *zhi* 知 in Zhu Xi does not entail a quest for the conditions, limits and sources of knowledge as in Kant, nor does it concern the question of how to justify or prove a religious belief by rational means as in Thomas Aquinas. Alternatively we will take a contextual approach and see Zhu Xi's doctrine of '*gewu zhizhi* 格物致知' in light of his sophisticated interpretation of *xin* 心 mind which is scattered in his *Sishu Zhangju Jizhu* 四書章句集註 *Commentaries on The Four Books*, *Wen Ji* 文集 *Literary Works* and *Yu Lei* 語類 *Conversations*. Once we affiliate Zhu Xi's notion of *zhi* 知 knowing with his doctrine of *xin* 心 mind according to the way it is presented in *Yu Lei* 語類 *Conversations*, and bear in mind his associating the doctrine of *gewu zhizhi* 格物致

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<sup>74</sup> Zhu Xi, 'Zhong Yong Zhangju Xu 中庸章句序 Preface to The Doctrine of the Mean', in *Sishu Zhangju Jizhu* 四書章句集註 *Commentaries on the Four Books* (1983), 14.

<sup>75</sup> Zhu Xi, *Sishu Zhangju Jizhu* 四書章句集註 *Commentaries on the Four Books* (1983), 349. See Chen Lai 陈来, *Zhuzi Zhaxue Yanjiu* 朱子哲学研究 *A Study of Zhu Xi's Philosophy* (2008), 213.

<sup>76</sup> Mou Zongsan, *Xinti yu Xingtì* 心體與性體 *Constitutive Mind and Constitutive Nature* (1968), 3 volumes.

<sup>77</sup> Yu Yingshi, 'Morality and Knowledge in Chu Hsi's Philosophical System' (1986), 228-54.

知 with *xue ju wen bian* 學聚問辨 learning, congregating, questioning, and debating in *Wen Yan* 文言 *The Commentary on the Text of Qian Diagram*, *mingshan zeshan* 明善擇善 knowing and choosing what is good in *Zhong Yong* 中庸 *The Doctrine of the Mean*, and *zhixing zhitian* 知性知天 knowing nature and the Heaven in *Mengzi* 孟子 *The Book of Mencius*,<sup>78</sup> it becomes clear that what Zhu Xi means by *zhi* 知 is fundamentally different from what we mean by knowledge in the modern sense, it primarily concerns the innate faculty of knowing which enables us to realise the existence of *li* 理 Principle and the good nature namely *xing* 性 that *tian* 天 Heaven bestows upon us, and none of the three - *li* 理, *xing* 性, *tian* 天- can be known on an empirical ground.

In his review on Mou Zongsan's three volumes *Xinti yu Xingti* 心體與性體 *Constitutive Mind and Constitutive Nature*, Tu Weiming acknowledges that Zhu Xi's concept of *gewu* 格物 is ethical-religious rather than empirical-scientific, but still insists that the road to sagehood in Zhu Xi differs not only from that of Mencius but also from those of the early Song masters including Cheng Yi.<sup>79</sup> Obviously the line drawn by Mou Zongsan which separates Zhu Xi from Mencius and other Song masters has little relevance to Zhu Xi's own understanding of *gewu zhizhi* 格物致知, for he clearly refers this doctrine to the teaching of Mencius as shown above. We cannot discuss at length how much justice Mou and Tu's interpretation does to Zhu Xi, but to the least it is plain that if Zhu Xi's *gewu* 格物 is not empirical-scientific as explained by Tu, then the concept of *zhizhi* 致知 in Zhu Xi ought not to be understood on empirical-scientific ground in the sense of acquiring the knowledge of an external object. In Zhu Xi's own terms, the doctrine of *gewu zhizhi* 格物致知 is meant to overarch both *xing er shang* 形而上 the metaphysical and *xing er xia* 形而下 the physical, for he does not presuppose a two-world system, but one world that consists of two dimensions, namely *xing er shang* 形而上 and *xing er xia* 形而下. On that basis Zhu Xi can easily relate *zhi* 知 to the metaphysical concepts such as *li* 理, *xing* 性 and *tian* 天, while in the same time insists that self-cultivation should start with the effort in *gewu* 格物 the investigation of things. Thus Zhu Xi's concept of *zhi* 知 covers a spectrum which is much broader than knowledge or what can be known, it also pertains to what can be thought, be realised, or even be experienced.

<sup>78</sup> See Zhu Xi, *DXHW* No. 45: '凡程子之爲說者不過如此。其於格物致知之傳詳矣。今也尋其義理既無可疑、考其字義亦皆有據。至以他書論之、則文言所謂學聚問辨、中庸所謂明善擇善、孟子所謂知性知天、又皆在乎固守力行之先、而可以驗夫大學始教之功爲有在乎此也。愚嘗反覆考之而有以信其必然。是以竊取其意以補傳文之闕。不然、則又安敢犯不韙之罪、爲無證之言、以自託於聖經賢傳之間乎。' *ZZQS*, 6,526.

<sup>79</sup> Tu Weiming, 'Mind and Human Nature', in *Humanity and Self-Cultivation* (1979), 111-8.

A contextual study makes it clear that we cannot easily find equivalence in English for Zhu Xi's *zhi* 知. As explained above, it could be misleading if *zhi* 知 is literally translated as knowledge or reason.<sup>80</sup> Since *zhi* 知 in Zhu Xi mostly pertains to the faculty of knowing which is deemed a function of *xin* 心 mind, a relatively better translation for *zhi* 知 is probably the human intellect. Nonetheless it is worth noting that Zhu Xi does not in particular distinguish sensory faculty from intellectual faculty as Aristotle does in his *De Anima*, nor does he clearly differentiate perception from thought in philosophical terms.<sup>81</sup> To rephrase it in Zhu Xi's terms, *zhi* 知 the human intellect together with *yi* 意 will and *qing* 情 sentiment constitute the major functions of *xin* 心 mind, whereas standing on its own, each of the three has its own *ti* 體 substance and *yong* 用 function, if applying this *ti-yong* 體用 theory to *zhi* 知, we can treat the human intellect as the substance of *zhi* 知 while the activity of knowing and what is known will fall into the category of its function, hence three possible translations of *zhi* 知 are to be considered, namely the human intellect or intellect, knowing and knowledge.

By translating Zhu Xi's *zhi* 知 as the human intellect rather than knowledge, the focus of attention in this research will consequently deviate from an epistemological ground. We will instead concentrate on the moral and spiritual implications of *zhi* 知 as presented in Zhu Xi's thinking, in other words, how the intellectual dimension is weaved into the tradition of Confucian morality and eventually serves to reinstate Confucian spirituality by establishing *Dao Tong* 道統 the transmission of the Way in a new social context. As this line of thought is more systematically formulated in his work on *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning* than elsewhere, we will narrow the primary sources down to those concerning *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning*, which consist mainly in *Da Xue Zhangju*

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<sup>80</sup> For a detailed discussion of fundamental differences between Zhu Xi's notion of *zhi* 知 and the epistemological sense of knowing, see Zhang Rulun 张汝伦, 'Guanyu Gewuzhizhi de Ruogan Wenti: yi Zhu Xi de Chanshi wei Zhongxin 关于格物致知的若干问题-以朱熹的阐释为中心 On a Few Questions regarding "the Investigation of Things and Extension of Knowledge": with a focus on Zhu Xi's Interpretation', in Wang Zhen 王震 (ed.), *Songdai Xin Ruxue de Jingshen Shijie-yi Zhuzi Xue we Zhongxin* 宋代新儒学的精神世界: 以朱子学为中心 *The Spiritual and Intellectual World of Neo-Confucianism in the Song Dynasty-with a focus on the study of Master Zhu* (2009), 52-71.

<sup>81</sup> Unlike Zhang Zai 張載 and Cheng Yi 程頤 Zhu Xi's doctrine of *gewu zhizhi* 格物致知 does not entail an emphasis on the distinction between *dexing zhizhi* 德性之知 innate knowledge and *wenjian zhizhi* 聞見之知 knowledge acquired through the senses.

See Zhu Xi, *ZZYL, Juan 34*: '問: 知, 有聞見之知否? 曰: 知, 只是一樣知, 但有真不真。爭這些子, 不是後來又別有一項知。淳錄' *ZZQS*, 15,1255.

*Ibid.* *Juan 98*: '世人心止於聞見之狹, 聖人盡性, 不以聞見梏其心。'伯豐問: "如何得不以聞見梏其心?" 曰: "張子此說, 是說聖人盡性事。如今人理會學, 須是有聞見, 豈能捨此? 先是於聞見上做工夫到, 然後脫然貫通。蓋尋常見聞, 一事只知得一個道理, 若到貫通, 便都是一理, 曾子是已。盡性, 是論聖人事。' *ZZQS*, 17,3311.

*Ibid.* *Juan 99*: '問橫渠"耳目知, 德性知"。答: 便是差了雖在聞見, 亦同此理。不知他資質如此, 何故如此差! 可學錄' *ZZQS*, 17,3334.



大學章句 *Commentary on The Great Learning* and *Da Xue Huo Wen* 大學或問 *Questions and Answers concerning The Great Learning*, more detailed elaboration is found in *Yu Lei* 語類 *Conversations* and *Wen Ji* 文集 *Literary Works*, as the contents of the two often encompassed each other, we will give priority to *Yu Lei* 語類 *Conversations*, and keep *Wen Ji* 文集 *Literary Works* as back-up source to refer to, hence is hardly quoted in this study.

Clearly it is from the Confucian notion of *zhi* 知 that the notion of the human intellect is to be elicited. This chapter, with a focus on Zhu Xi's understanding of the human intellect based on his interpretation of *zhi* 知, will proceed in three parts. First, we will explore how Zhu Xi the editor re-edits and rearranges the text of *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning*. In the second part we will focus on his *Da Xue Zhangju* 大學章句 *Commentary on The Great Learning* and discuss how Zhu Xi the commentator's notion of the human intellect is unfolded through a philosophical interpretation of the text. In the third part we will focus on his *Da Xue Huo Wen* 大學或問 *Questions and Answers concerning The Great Learning* and examine how Zhu Xi the philosopher attempts to put his personal thought into philosophical terms and to express it in a systematic and dialectical manner.

### 1.1 Zhu Xi the Editor: Reshuffling the Schema of *The Great Learning*

Zhu Xi's work on *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning* transforms this text in terms of its structure, meaning and status. As recent studies have discussed at length the ascent of this text in the Neo-Confucian movement in the Song Dynasty,<sup>82</sup> it is unnecessary to present in detail a historical account of this issue here. Rather, we will focus on Zhu Xi's critical work on this text, with the intention of revealing the profound implications of his editorial work, as well as its crucial importance to Zhu Xi's intellectual reconstruction of Confucian tradition.

Unsatisfied with the editorial work of the prominent master Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127-200) in the East Han Dynasty 東漢 (25-220), and with that of his predecessor Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033-1107), Zhu Xi set out to rearrange the text of *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning* based on the framework of the two preceding editions, an undertaking that finally resulted in the critical edition as shown in his *Commentary*. Owing to Zhu Xi's

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<sup>82</sup> For instance, an excellent paper delivered by Yang Rubin 楊儒賓, 'Zhong Yong Da Xue Biancheng Jingdian de Licheng: cong xinming zhishu de guandian lilun 《中庸》、《大學》變成經典的歷程：從性命之書的觀點立論 Proceedings as to the Ascent of The Doctrine of the Mean and The Great Learning', in Li Minghui 李明輝(ed.), *Zhongguo Jingdian Quanshi Chuantong-Ruxue Pian* 中國經典詮釋傳統-儒學篇 *The Tradition of Scriptural Exegesis in China – Confucianism* (Taipei, 2002), 113-57.

edition and the subsequent line-by-line commentary, the architectonic beauty of this text was dramatically brought to light, and the logical rendering of it started to be accepted by Confucian scholars, irrespective of their diverse academic backgrounds and research interests. To Zhu Xi, *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning* surely outstrips all the other Confucian scriptures insofar as structure and logic are concerned, as will be explained below.

### 1.1.1 Affirming the Priority of *The Great Learning*

With an aspiration to reinstate the education system believed to have been established by the ancient sages, Zhu Xi was fully engaged in preparing a set of Confucian textbooks for those keen to learn. That project was eventually crowned with the compilation of *Si Shu* 四書 *The Four Books: Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning*, *Lunyu* 論語 *The Analects*, *Mengzi* 孟子 *The Book of Mencius*, and *Zhong Yong* 中庸 *The Doctrine of the Mean*, among which *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning* occupies the first place.

Undoubtedly the logical structure contained in this old text constitutes the scriptural ground for Zhu Xi's own reconstruction project. Nevertheless, Zhu Xi's preference for *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning* is not only an expression of his personal academic interest, but is driven by his profound sense of mission, to re-establish the eightoederororderly Confucian education in the whole society. According to the eight-step program as presented in *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning*, namely *gewu* *zhizhi* 格物致知 the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge, *chengyi* 誠意 the sincerity of the will, *zhengxin* 正心 the rectification of the mind, *xiushen* 修身 the cultivation of the self, *qijia* 齊家 the regulation of the family, *zhiguo* 治國 the governing of the state, and *pingtianxia* 平天下 the pacifying of the world. Clearly the Confucian way of self-cultivation does not cut off one's link with the society but makes it a norm that self-cultivation ought to be performed within the social network.

The integration of spiritual and social significance with regard to Confucian learning in the sense of self-cultivation has been addressed by eminent Confucian scholars such as Xu Fuguan and Wm. Theodore de Bary. Xu makes the point that *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning* synthesises the diverse branches of Confucian thought in the *xian Qin* 先秦 (pre-Qin period -221 B.C.). He maintains that the method of Confucian learning in this text is expressed as *ge wu* 格物, which suggests the ability of empathy; hence the proceeding of Confucian learning lies in applying one's empathy to an ever-extending realm, beginning with one's *shen* 身 self, then reaching out to the family clan, the home

country, and finally the whole world.<sup>83</sup> A similar point is made by de Bary, who holds that in the context of Neo-Confucianism<sup>84</sup> the ‘learning of the sages’ or ‘Way of the sages’ takes on a deeper significance in the sense that an individual’s personal cultivation exemplifies the Way of the sages, and the moral self-reformation that is being carried out on the personal level holds the key to the renewal of the society in which one lives. Bary comes to the conclusion that following this path requires intellectual, moral and spiritual cultivation; therefore ‘undertaking such a commitment amounted virtually to a religious decision, it meant dedicating oneself to a set of ultimate values such as one could live or die for’.<sup>85</sup> With regard to the Song Confucian masters who have cultivated a strong sense a mission and collectively intend to resume *Dao tong* 道統 the transmission of the Way, this statement holds true.

Seen in that light, it becomes clear that Zhu Xi’s academic endeavours surrounding the text of *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning* have profound social, moral and spiritual implications. Such is the importance of this text that the academic research on it somehow creates the possibility for a revival of Confucianism among the Song literati. The discovery of it can be traced back to the Tang Dynasty 唐 (618–907). Some Tang Confucian scholars had already begun to pay attention to this short text, in particular Han Yu 韓愈 (768-824) and Li Ao 李翱 (772- 841). Li Ao quotes it in his essay *Fu Xing Shu* 復性書 *The Recovery of the Nature*,<sup>86</sup> making particular reference to the line ‘*zhizhi zai gewu* 致知在格物 the extension of knowledge lies in the investigation of things’. This trend continues in the Song; for instance the distinguished historian Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019-1086) starts to write a commentary<sup>87</sup> on this chapter as a separate book, and lays emphasis on the line stressed by Li Ao. Another eminent Confucian master of the Northern Song, Zhang Zai 張載 (1020–1077), also asserts the legitimacy of *Da Xue* 大

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<sup>83</sup> Xu Fu-guan 徐復觀, ‘Xianqin Rujia Sixiang de Zonghe-Da Xue zhi Dao 先秦儒家思想的綜合-大學之道 The Synthesis of Confucian Thought in pre-Qin Time: The Art of the great learning’, in *Zhongguo Renxinglun Shi-Xianqin Pian* 中國人性論史：先秦篇 *History concerning the Development of Chinese Thought on Human Nature: pre-Qin* (Taipei, 1979), 263-314.

<sup>84</sup> For a brief and clear introduction to Neo-Confucianism, including its historical background and formation, see John H. Berthrong, *Concerning Creativity: A Comparison of Chu Hsi, Whitehead, and Neville* (Albany, 1998), 97-109.

<sup>85</sup> See Wm. Theodore De Bary, *The Message of the Mind in Neo-Confucianism* (New York, 1989), 2.

<sup>86</sup> For an English translation of *Fu Xing Shu* 復性書, see Wing-Tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton, 1969), 456-9.

<sup>87</sup> A record of Sima’s commentary – *Zhong Yong Da Xue guang yi* 《中庸》《大學》廣義 – is seen in the Song bibliography, but this text is no longer extant.

學 *The Great Learning*.<sup>88</sup> All these preparatory works pave the way for the formal ascent of it, which is completed by the Cheng-Zhu school. Cheng brothers single *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning* out from *Li Ji* 禮記 *The Book of the Ritual*, and make it stand on its own merit.<sup>89</sup> With the independent status of the text already established, Zhu Xi reinforces its pedagogic significance and finally ranks *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning* the first among *Si Shu* 四書 *The Four Books*.

The reasons for such an innovative order are given as follows: 1) The teaching contained in *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning* can be universally applied to the whole world, and its words handed down from generation to generation; 2) It possesses a massive structure with a well organised outline and is consistent from the beginning to the end; 3) It provides the learner with a method of self-cultivation, with step-by-step instructions; and 4) It refers to things at hand, thus can easily be grasped by a beginner.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> As Daniel K. Gardner points out, that the text had achieved a status independent of *Li Ji* 禮記 *The Book of the Ritual* by the middle of the eleventh century is evidenced by Zhang Zai's comment. For details, see Daniel K. Gardner, *Chu Hsi and the Ta-hsueh: Neo-Confucian Reflection on the Confucian Canon* (1986), 17-26.

<sup>89</sup> According to the historical research conducted by Yang Rubin 楊儒賓, the earliest record of the separate publication of *The Great Learning* is in 1030, see note 81.

<sup>90</sup> Zhu Xi, *DXHW* No. 17: “曰、程子之先是書而後論孟、又且不及乎中庸、何也。曰、是書垂世立教之大典、通為天下後世而言者也。論孟應機接物之微言、或因一時一事而發者也。是以是書之規模雖大、然其首尾該備而綱領可尋、節目分明而工夫有序、無非切於學者之日用。論孟之為人雖切、然而問者非一人、記者非一手、或先後淺深之無序、或抑揚進退之不齊、其間蓋有非初學日用之所及者。此程子所以先是書而後論孟、蓋以其難易緩急言之、而非以聖人之言為有優劣也。至於中庸、則又聖門傳授極致之言、尤非後學之所易得而聞者。故程子之教未遽及之。豈不又以為論孟既通、然後可以及此乎。蓋不先乎大學、無以提挈綱領而盡論孟之精微。不參之論孟、無以融貫會通而極中庸之歸趣。然不會其極於中庸、則又何以建立大本、經綸大經、而讀天下之書、論天下之事哉。以是觀之、則務講學者固不可不急於四書、而讀四書者又不可不先於大學、亦已明矣。今之教者乃或棄此不務、而反以他說先焉。其不溺於虛空、流於功利、而得罪於聖門者幾希矣。” *ZZQS*, 6,515.

Question: Master Cheng gives this book priority over *The Analects* and *The Book of Mencius*, however his teaching does not seem to have touched on *The Doctrine of the Mean*, why?

Answer: This book serves as the great scripture whose teaching can be universally applied to the whole world and its words meant to be handed down generation after generation. By contrast, *The Analects* and *The Book of Mencius* contain the aphorisms referring to the way one interacts with the surroundings, or hold the words that arise from specific circumstances. In spite of its massive structure, this book is consistent from the beginning to the end, the outlines of which can be grasped, the programs included in which are clearly laid out, and whose method for self-cultivation provides step by step instructions relevant to the daily life of a learner.

Although the teachings of *The Analects* and *The Book of Mencius* are also relevant to things at hand, however in both cases more than one person are involved in asking questions and more than one involved in scribing. Hence it lacks a clear order in laying out the sequence and the depth of the questions, and in its hints on moral judgement. In both there are elements showing no clear relevance to daily life and which cannot be grasped by a beginner. That is why Master Cheng gives this book priority over *The Analects* and *The Book of Mencius* on the ground of the levels of difficulty and the degrees of urgency, which does not mean that he differentiates the words of the sages in terms of quality.

As for *The Doctrine of the Mean*, it retains the ultimate words that have been transmitted within the school of Confucianism, and that are particularly hard for the learners in later generations to hear or attain to. For that reason, it is not touched on by Master Cheng in his teaching. Does that not give the hint that once the teaching of *The Analects* and *The Book of Mencius* is mastered, the access to *The Doctrine of the Mean* will then be available? So one who fails to start with the book of *The Great Learning* will by no means be able to grasp the main themes and outlines, so as to comprehend the subtlety and profundity

By contrast, *Lunyu* 論語 *The Analects* and *Mengzi* 孟子 *The Book of Mencius* are relatively less tidy in their format, since both texts are collections of aphorisms. To Zhu Xi such an aphoristic feature leads to limited application, for the words of Confucius and Mencius as reported in *Lunyu* 論語 *The Analects* and *Mengzi* 孟子 *The Book of Mencius* are always bound up with the specific occasions from which they arise, hence cannot be treated as norms for universal application. In addition, there is usually more than one person involved in asking questions, and likewise more than one engaged in transcribing the conversations. Hence these two texts share a deficiency in clarity of presentation. According to Zhu Xi's observation, both lack a logical layout, given the depths of the questions and the sequence in which these questions are asked. Furthermore, both contain an element of ambiguity, since there are some sayings and words which indicate no explicit relevance to daily life, and will easily arouse confusion in a beginner.<sup>91</sup>

With a focus on the text itself rather than its authorship, Zhu Xi shifts attention to the quality of the text, especially the logical rendering, the structure and the format, hence gives priority to *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning* and allows it to stand before *Lunyu* 論語 *The Analects* and *Mengzi* 孟子 *The Book of Mencius*.<sup>92</sup> On the other hand, the order of *Sishu* 四書 *The Four Books* suggests an increase in difficulty to the reader, especially as regards the last of the four, *Zhong Yong* 中庸 *The Doctrine of the Mean*. Unsurprisingly *Zhong Yong* 中庸 *The Doctrine of the Mean* is deemed the very vehicle through which the ultimate truth is to be transmitted from the ancient time down to the present. From Zhu Xi's point of view, this book is too abstract and too weighty to be

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of *The Analects* and *The Book of Mencius*. Without referring to *The Analects* and *The Book of Mencius*, there is no chance of completely understanding the whole system of thought and attaining the ultimate truth in which *The Doctrine of the Mean* reposes.

Provided the ultimate teaching of *The Doctrine of the Mean* is not grasped, on what could one fall back to establish the great foundation (for one's learning) and to master the great scriptures, so that one will have the capacity for reading all books and discussing all affairs in the world? From that point of view, it is clear that those who engage with teaching Confucian classics cannot postpone the curriculum of *The Four Books*, and those who are studying *The Four Books* have to start with *The Great Learning*. Teachers nowadays may leave it aside and start with other teachings, very rarely will they escape from indulging in emptiness, getting lost in utilitarianism and deviating from the sacred teaching.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> Despite the importance attached to *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning*, Cheng Yi suggests one should start with *Lunyu* 論語 *The Analects* and *Mengzi* 孟子 *The Book of Mencius*, and use the doctrines presented in these two Confucian scriptures to measure other books. See Cheng Yi, 'Henan Chengshi Yishu 河南程氏遺書 Posthumous Work of the Two Cheng Masters', *Juan* 18, *Er Cheng Ji* 二程集 *Works of the Two Chengs* (1981), 1,205.

handled by an immature mind, and therefore it should not be introduced to a beginner.<sup>93</sup> Only after the other three have been properly understood, will one be able to assimilate the divine knowledge contained in this book.

The interrelation between *Sishu* 四書 *The Four Books* constitutes the logic of a systematic training in Confucian classics, and also implies an orderly procedure of scriptural learning which should be followed by all.<sup>94</sup> The curriculum of *Sishu* 四書 *The Four Books* should be addressed, and the orderly procedure ought to be observed by masters and students alike. One should start with *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning* so as to grasp the framework of the whole Confucian doctrine, then move on to *Lunyu* 論語 *The Analects* and *Mengzi* 孟子 *The Book of Mencius*, in which a detailed and vivid illustration of the divine teaching are to be found, and only then approach *Zhong Yong* 中庸 *The Doctrine of the Mean*, which retains the ultimate truth.<sup>95</sup>

Having clarified the different roles played by each of *Sishu* 四書 *The Four Books* in the classical education, Zhu Xi comes back to the most urgent issue: how to initiate a beginner into this systematic training. In line with the teaching of Cheng Yi and also pushing it one step further, Zhu Xi takes *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning* ‘as a surviving work of the Confucian school and the very gate through which a beginner may step into the realm of virtue’.<sup>96</sup> He attaches ultimate importance to *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning*, considering it as the only scriptural text in which the wisdom of the ancient sages has been schematised into an orderly eight-step procedure. Hence *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning* should be the very scripture that serves to initiate the learner into the path of the ancient sages.

Zhu Xi gives the Cheng brothers all the credit for their discovering and revising of *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning*:

Since then [the death of Mencius], the essence of Confucianism was hardly seen in the prevailing trends of learning. The skills of reciting and learning the texts by heart had been practised by those worldly-minded Confucian scholars

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<sup>93</sup> Zhu Xi, *DXHW* No. 17, *ZZQS*, 6,515.

<sup>94</sup> The method by which I choose to probe into Zhu Xi’s system is fundamentally an intellectual pondering upon the intellectual operation that Zhu Xi has performed on the Confucian classics. For a general discussion of the significance of *The Four Books* and the principal message Zhu Xi intends to convey through his work on them, see Daniel K. Gardner, *The Four Books: The basic teachings of the later Confucian tradition* (Indianapolis, 2007).

<sup>95</sup> Zhu Xi, *DXHW* No. 17, *ZZQS*, 6,515.

<sup>96</sup> ‘子程子曰：“大学，孔氏之遗书，而初学入德之门也”。于今可见古人为学次第者，独赖此篇之存，而论、孟次之。学者必由是而学焉，则庶乎其不差矣。’ See Zhu Xi, *DXZJ*, in *Sishu Zhangju Jizhu* 四書章句集註 *Commentary on the Four Books* (1983), 3.

whose painstaking effort was two times harder than the primary learning yet ended in futility. The heretical doctrine of emptiness and quietism seems to have possessed a foothold higher than the great learning yet hardly consisted in facts. Besides, there were many other schools of thought whose teaching may have focused on strategies and practical skills or aimed at seeking a political career. All of these had perplexed the society, deceived people and blocked the way of humanity and righteousness. Thus the noble men could not hear about the essence of the great Way, nor would the wicked ones benefit from a well-organised society. ...

... Thus the society fell into chaos and turmoil until the Song Dynasty was founded, virtue started to take over and the right teaching came to predominate; under such a circumstance did the two Cheng masters stand out whose excellence makes them qualified to be the successors of Mencius. It is them who first picked up this treatise and gave interpretation of its hidden meaning. Due to their efforts, the method of the great learning practised by the ancients and the essence of the holy scriptures once again became manifest in the world. In spite of being unintelligent, I am so fortunate to have received education indirectly in their teaching. Having noticed that their editing of this book is not very focused,<sup>97</sup> I then collected their work and added my supplementary interpretation to it in the hope of serving the gentle men in the generations to come.<sup>98</sup>

Zhu Xi ranks the two Cheng masters as the only people who had grasped the essence of Confucianism after Mencius, and presents himself as their successor, as one who attempts to sharpen their thought and complement it with his own interpretation. And only through Zhu Xi's edition and interpretation did the educational, moral and political programs expressed in this book come to the fore. In his *Da Xue Zhangju* 大學章句 (*Commentary on The Great Learning*), Zhu Xi takes the 'eight steps' as the

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<sup>97</sup> The translation of 'fangshi' 放失 is open to discussion. Daniel K. Gardner translates it as 'errata and lacunae', see Daniel K. Gardner, *Chu Hsi and the Ta-hsueh: Neo-Confucian Reflection on the Confucian Canon* (1986), 34.

<sup>98</sup> Zhu Xi, *Da Xue Zhangju Xu* 大學章句序 (*Preface to Da Xue Zhangju*): '自是以來，俗儒記誦詞章之習，其功倍于小學而無用；異端虛無寂滅之教，其高過于大學而無實。其它權謀術數，一切以就功名之說，與夫百家眾技之流，所以惑世誣民、充塞仁義者，又紛然雜出乎其間。使其君子不幸而不得聞大道之要，其小人不幸而不得蒙至治之澤，晦盲否塞，反復沈痼，以及五季之衰，而壞亂極矣！天運循環，無往不復。宋德隆盛，治教休明。于是河南程氏兩夫子出，而有以接乎孟氏之傳。實始尊信此篇而表章之，既又為之次其簡編，發其歸趣，然後古者大學教人之法、聖經賢傳之指，粲然復明于世。雖以熹之不敏，亦幸私淑而有聞焉。顧其為書猶頗放失，是以忘其固陋，采而輯之，閑亦竊附己意，補其闕略，以俟後之君子。' *Sishu Zhangju Jizhu* 四書章句集註 *Commentaries on the Four Books* (1983), 1.

unchangeable order of Confucian learning, and the investigation of things as the first step bears fundamental significance for the whole process. Zhu Xi claims that one who has failed to go through this order or overlooked the doctrine of the investigation of things is bound to deviate from the orthodox and slide into the heterodox.

In the eyes of his followers such as his favourite pupil Chen Chun 陳淳 (1159-1223) Zhu Xi was undoubtedly alone in having been commissioned to transmit the divine lineage. As he puts it:

The Way can be transmitted only when there is the proper person.... Who at the present time is perfectly qualified to be the true successor of the Chengs except you? ...The Way of Confucius (551-479 B.C.), Mencius (372-289 B.C.), Chou Tun-I (1017-73), and the Chengs have become more brilliant in you. You alone can be called the leader of the generation.<sup>99</sup>

In this letter addressed to his master, Chen Chun boldly expresses his admiration for Zhu Xi's groundbreaking reconstruction of Confucianism. From his point of view Zhu Xi has outstripped his predecessors<sup>100</sup> in the sense that the Way presented by the Confucian sages has become 'more brilliant' in him, and he is also the most outstanding Confucian master among his contemporary counterparts; thus Zhu Xi 'alone' is qualified to lead the trend of Confucian thought of the time.

In Confucian history, it was probably not until the Tang Dynasty 唐 (618-907) that *dao tong* 道統 the transmission of the Way became an issue to the Confucian literati, due to the stimulation and competitive force emanating from the prevailing trend of Zen Buddhism. The concept of *dao tong* 道統 the transmission of the Way is formally proposed by Han Yu 韓愈 (768-824) in his renowned philosophical treatise *Yuan Dao*

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<sup>99</sup> Chen Chun 陳淳, trans. by Wing-tsit Chan, *Beixi Ziyi* 北溪字義 *Neo-Confucian Terms Explained* (New York, 1986), 8.

<sup>100</sup> Here we find a controversy over the status of Zhou Dunyi. Chen Chun seems to hold a different view from his master, as Chen in particular mentions Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤, but Zhou's name is not found in Zhu Xi's Prefaces to *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning* and *Zhong Yong* 中庸 *The Doctrine of the Mean*, nor in his Foreword to *Mengzi* 孟子 *The Book of Mencius*. To clarify Zhu Xi's view of point, we have to refer this question back to what is stated in *Yi Luo Yuanyuan Lu* 伊洛淵源錄 *The Intellectual Genealogy of Masters in the Region of Yi Luo*, where Zhu Xi on the one hand retells the story that the Cheng brothers received the teaching of Zhou Dunyi (ZZQS, 12,926), but on the other hand makes it clear through the mouth of Hu Anguo 胡安國 (in his *zou zhuang* 奏狀 *Memorial to the Throne*) that the Way of the ancient sages was not brought to light until the emergence of the two Chengs (ZZQS, 12,975), which echoes the tone of Zhu Xi's Prefaces. For a detailed discussion over Zhu Xi's treatment of Zhou Dunyi, see Ellen Neskari, *Politics and Prayer: Shrines to Local Former Worthies in Sung China*, Harvard-Yenching Institute Monograph Series 54 (Harvard, 2001).



原道 *An Inquiry on the Way*,<sup>101</sup> in which he openly refutes the legitimacy of Buddhism and sets up the Confucian version of the succession of the spiritual lineage, namely the Way, starting from the ancient sage-kings Yao-尧, Shun-舜 and Yu-禹, to King Tang-汤 of the Shang Dynasty 商 (1520-1030 B.C.) and the two kings Wen-文 and Wu-武 of the early Zhou period 西周 (1030-720 B.C.), to the duke of Zhou-周公, from whom Confucius inherits the Way, and then from Confucius to Mencius, after whom the succession is cut off.<sup>102</sup>

Han Yu's account of the succession of the Way within Confucian tradition is highly regarded by the Cheng brothers and later stressed by Zhu Xi in his *Mengzi Xushuo* 孟子序說 *Foreword to The Book of Mencius*.<sup>103</sup> At the very beginning of the *Foreword*, Zhu Xi quotes the biography of Mencius provided by Sima Qian 司馬遷 (145-90 B.C.), in which it is mentioned that Mencius received his education from the disciples of Zisi 子思 (483-402 B.C.), the grandson of Confucius. In his *Zhong Yong Zhangju Xu* 中庸章句序 *Preface to The Doctrine of the Mean*, Zhu Xi grants the authorship of *Zhong Yong* 中庸 *The Doctrine of the Mean* to Zisi 子思, who received the transmission of the Way from Zengzi 曾子 (505-435 B.C.), a direct disciple of Confucius and author of *Zhuan* 傳 the *Commentary* text of *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning*. Zhu Xi thus inserts Zengzi 曾子 and Zisi 子思 into the gap between Confucius and Mencius, thereby enriching Han Yu's account of the transmission of the Way within Confucian tradition. Moreover, in his *Da Xue Zhangju Xu* 大學章句序 *Preface to The Great Learning* Zhu Xi depicts the Cheng brothers as the successors of Mencius after the transmission had been cut off for over a thousand years. As for the proof of his own legitimacy as a successor of Cheng Yi, Zhu Xi leaves it an issue to be dealt with in *Da Xue Huo Wen* 大學或問 *Q&A*

<sup>101</sup> In his account of *dao tong* 道統 the transmission of the Way, Han Yu takes an apologetic stance, intending to highlight the one single line of orthodoxy in Confucian history. This account, however, is too narrow to accommodate the diversity of Confucianism as a tradition of thought. In contrast to Han Yu's one-line-orthodoxy, modern scholars such as Qian Mu tend to delineate Confucianism as a tradition that is constantly broadening its realm; hence we see multiple lines of thought within the same tradition and a good variety of ways in which this tradition develops itself. For a detailed elaboration on this topic, see Yu Yingshi 余英时, 'Qian Mu yu Xinrujia 钱穆与新儒家 Qian Mu and the New-Confucian Writers', in *Qian Mu yu Xiandai Zhongguo Xueshu* 钱穆与现代中国学术 *Qian Mu and the Modern Chinese Scholarship* (Guilin, 2006), 26-80.

<sup>102</sup> Han Yu, *Yuan Dao* 原道: '尧以是传之舜, 舜以是传之禹, 禹以是传之汤, 汤以是传之文武周公, 文武周公传之孔子, 孔子传之孟轲。轲之死, 不得其传焉。' *Han Changli Quanji* 韩昌黎全集 *Complete Works of Han Yu*, *Juan* 11. For English translation of this text, see Wing-Tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (1969), 454-6.

<sup>103</sup> Zhu Xi, *Sishu Zhangju Jizhu* 四書章句集註 *Commentaries on the Four Books* (1983), 197-200.

concerning *The Great Learning*. The grounds for Zhu Xi's self-defence have been clarified by his disciple Chen Chun, as shown above.

Through the collective effort of the Cheng-Zhu school, the Confucian concept of *dao tong* 道統 the transmission of the Way was formally established and widely accepted by the Song Confucian adherents, scholars and non-scholars alike.<sup>104</sup> This was decisive not only for the theoretical reconstruction of Confucianism in the Song, but also to the revival of the Confucianism as a tradition of religious thought. In line with Cheng Yi, Zhu Xi finds in the text of *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning* a brief and systematic expression of his own vision of the orthodox Confucian doctrine. This is because, 'in it he found a brief but eloquent summary of Confucian ideals – personal cultivation and the ordering of society'.<sup>105</sup> That discovery tremendously reinforced his ambition to reconstruct the Confucian tradition by means of rearranging this transmitted text.

### 1.1.2 Re-editing *The Great Learning*

Through the text of *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning*, we find a clear logical continuity from the thought of Cheng Yi to that of Zhu Xi. In beginning the work to elevate this text to the status of an independent scripture, the Cheng brothers first single out the text of *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning* from *Li Ji* 禮記 *The Book of the Ritual*, and then re-edit it on the basis of Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127-200)'s edition. Although they never manage to compose a commentary on this newly canonised scripture, they do provide their own philosophical interpretation of it, which is mainly retained in *Henan Chengshi Yishu* 河南程氏遺書 *Posthumous Work of the Two Cheng Masters* edited and prefaced by Zhu Xi.<sup>106</sup> Cheng Yi, in particular, elucidates the meaning of *ge wu* 格物 the investigation of things, which constitutes the core of his teaching.<sup>107</sup> Yet in Cheng Yi the editorial work on *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning* and a philosophical reading of the doctrine of *ge wu* 格物 the investigation of things are kept apart; despite the connection of the two, Cheng Yi never manages to fuse them in one text.

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<sup>104</sup> Jin Chunfeng 金春峰, 'Zhuxi Daotongshuo de Jianli yu Wancheng-cong sixiangshi suozuo de fenxi 朱熹道統說的建立與完成-從思想史所作的分析 The Establishment and Completion of Zhu Xi's Doctrine concerning the Transmission of the Way-analysis from the perspective of the intellectual history of Confucianism', *Qiuzhou Xuelin* 九州學林 *Qiuzhou Academic Journal* 11 (2006), 45-77.

<sup>105</sup> Daniel K. Gardner, *Chu Hsi and the Ta-hsueh: Neo-Confucian Reflection on the Confucian Canon* (1986), 42.

<sup>106</sup> This text is collected in *Er Cheng Ji* 二程集 *Works of the Two Chengs* (1981), 1.

<sup>107</sup> Cheng Yi, 'Henan Chengshi Yishu 河南程氏遺書 Posthumous Work of the Two Cheng Masters', *Juan* 18, *Er Cheng Ji* 二程集 *Works of the Two Chengs* (1981), 1,188.

That task was completed by Zhu Xi.<sup>108</sup> With Cheng Yi's doctrine of *ge wu* 格物 the investigation of things in mind, Zhu Xi pushes the editing one step further and creates a clear structure for this text, based on the edition of Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127-200)<sup>109</sup> and the two slightly different editions provided by Cheng Hao (1032-1085)<sup>110</sup> and Cheng Yi (1033-1107)<sup>111</sup>.

The differences between the four editions are shown in the table as presented in Appendix 1.

### 1.1.3 An Analysis of the Structure of Zhu Xi's Edition

At first glance, one may have the impression that the structure of Zhu Xi's edition of *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning* is achieved simply by editorial craft, by attaching to the original text a two-layer-division: the division between the *Scripture* and the *Commentary* and a subdivision of the commentary part. However, beneath this apparent simplicity there lies much more to be excavated.

#### a. Division between the Scripture and the Commentary

In comparison with Zheng Xuan and the Cheng brothers, Zhu Xi is certainly treating scripture in a more innovative and daring manner. In separating the scriptural part from the commentatorial part, Zhu Xi is proposing an unprecedented methodology, which entails the necessity of differentiating the scriptural words from the words of commentary even within the same text, in this case, *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning*. Zhu Xi regards the *Jing* 經 *Scripture* as containing the words of Confucius recorded by Zengzi, while the *Zhuan* 傳 *Commentary* represents the thought of Zengzi transcribed by his disciples.<sup>112</sup> Accordingly, the role of the former is to be distinguished from that of the latter, since the scriptural text represents an undiluted version of the sacred message directly from the ancient sages, whereas the commentatorial text serves to enhance the accessibility of the scriptural words, in the hope of getting the divine message across. Thus a hierarchical relationship between the two parts is brought to

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<sup>108</sup> Zhu Xi, *Sishu Zhangju Jizhu* 四書章句集註 *Commentaries on the Four Books* (1983), 1-13.

<sup>109</sup> Zheng Xuan, *Shisanjing Zhushu* 十三經註疏六 *Commentaries on the Thirteen Classics*, 6, *Liji Zhengyi Juan di Liushi* 禮記正義卷第六十 *Orthodox Interpretation of the Book of Rites*, Juan 60, *Da Xue di Sishier* 大學第四十二 *The Great Learning*, No. 42 (Beijing, 1999), 1592-613.

<sup>110</sup> Cheng Hao, 'Henan Chengshi Jingshuo 河南程氏經說 Comments on Scriptures', *Juan 5, Er Cheng Ji* 二程集 *Works of the Two Chengs* (1981), 4, 1126-9.

<sup>111</sup> Cheng Yi, 'Henan Chengshi Jingshuo 河南程氏經說 Comments on Scriptures', *Juan 5, Er Cheng Ji* 二程集 *Works of the Two Chengs* (1981), 4, 1129-32.

<sup>112</sup> Zhu Xi spells out the reasons for this speculation in *DXHW* No. 16, *ZZQS*, 6, 514.

light: the *Jing* 經 *Scripture* commands the *Zhuan* 傳 *Commentary* and the *Zhuan* 傳 *Commentary* is subordinate to the *Jing* 經 *Scripture*.<sup>113</sup> This division makes it obvious that Zhu Xi's amends are confined to the part of *Zhuan* 傳 *Commentary*, whereas the words of Confucius he claims to be contained in the part of *Jing* 經 *Scripture*, is left unchanged.

#### **b. Subdivision of the Commentary**

The *Zhuan* 傳 *Commentary* is then subdivided into ten chapters according to the order inherent in the *Jing* 經 *Scripture*. The first three chapters refer to the three items of the divine learning: to realise *ming mingde* 明明德 the enlightening virtue, to 新民 *xin min* renew the people and *zhiyu zhishan* 止於至善 to repose in the ultimate goodness; the fourth illustrates the meaning of and the relation of *benmo* 本末 root and branches or the essential and the trivial; the fifth deals with the first two steps: *gewu zhizhi* 格物致知 the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge; the sixth elaborates upon the meaning of *chengyi* 誠意 the sincerity of the will; the seventh upon that of *zhengxin xiushen* 正心修身 the rectification of the mind and the cultivation of the person; the eighth upon that of *xiushen qijia* 修身齊家 the cultivation of the person and the regulation of the family; the ninth upon that of *qijia zhiguo* 齊家治國 the regulation of the family and the governing of the state; and the tenth upon that of *zhiguo pingtianxia* 治國平天下 the governing of the state and the pacifying of the world.

This way of structuring presupposes a strong belief in the compatibility between wisdom and logic, whereby the words contained in *Jing* 經 *Scripture* will be better understood with the aid of the logical explanation provided in *Zhuan* 傳 *Commentary*. The *Jing* 經 *Scripture* is derived from personal experiential knowledge of the ancient sages; it thus bears the fullness and richness of a sagely life. In contrast, the *Zhuan* 傳 *Commentary*, as an explanation of the meaning of the sacred words, serves to analyse, excavate and organise the meaning of the *Jing* 經 *Scripture*. In other words, the *Zhuan* 傳 *Commentary* means to break the wholeness of the *Jing* 經 *Scripture* and aims to unfold the whole picture bit by bit, layer by layer. As a result, the *Scripture* gains its intellectual meaning and becomes accessible to a logical mind. Through the writing of the *Zhuan* 傳 *Commentary*, the *Jing* 經 *Scripture* is evolved from an experiential ground to an intellectual ground, hence becomes something that can be taught and discussed.

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<sup>113</sup> Zhu Xi, *DXHW* No. 18: “曰、以經統傳、以傳附經、則其次第可知而二說之不然審矣。” *ZZQS*, 6,515.

In that sense, the *Zhuan 傳 Commentary* ought not to bear the same style as that of the *Jing 經 Scripture*; rather, a different standard should be applied to the wording of the *Zhuan 傳 Commentary* as compared to that of the *Jing 經 Scripture*. The commentarial text should be rendered in a logical fashion, such that accuracy and clarity are privileged.

### **c. Inserting a Supplement into the Commentary**

According to Zhu Xi's arrangement of the *Zhuan 傳 Commentary*, it is clear that all the essential points listed in the *Jing 經 Scripture* are to be elaborated. On that ground, Zhu Xi maintains that if the explanation of the first two steps, namely the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge, is not seen in the existing text, it must have been omitted. He then produces a *Bu Zhuan 補傳 Supplement* to this section which goes as follows:

“The Words, ‘the extension of knowledge lies in the investigation of things,’ mean that we should apply ourselves to things so as to gain an exhaustive knowledge of their Principles. This is because there is no human intelligence utterly devoid of knowledge, and no single thing in the world without Principle. So long as the investigation of these Principles is not exhaustive, the knowledge of them will by no means be comprehensive. That is why *The Great Learning* primarily commands all the students to seek the knowledge of the Principles by means of investigating all things in the world, namely to proceed from the Principles already known to him, to a further exhaustive knowledge and finally attaining the ultimate. After having exerted such an effort for a long time, suddenly a breakthrough will be made and the complete understanding will dawn on one. Thereby brings about a thorough comprehension of all the multitude of things, be it external or internal, fine or coarse; and the whole entity and the great function of one's own mind will be fully realised, which, [as a whole] signifies the state after ‘things have been investigated’ and ‘the knowledge has been extended to the utmost.’”<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Zhu Xi: “所謂致知在格物者，言欲致吾之知，在即物而窮其理也。蓋人心之靈莫不有知，而天下之物莫不有理，惟于理有未窮，故其知有不盡也。是以大學始教，必使學者即凡天下之物，莫不因其已知之理而益窮之，以求至乎其極。至于用力之久，而壹旦豁然貫通焉，則衆物之表裏精粗無不到，而吾心之全體大用無不明矣。此謂物格，此謂知之至也。” *Sishu Zhangju Jizhu 四書章句集註 Commentaries on the Four Books* (1983), 6-7.

This section is based on Derk Bodde's translation, with alterations made accordingly. For details, see Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, trans. by Derk Bodde (Princeton, 1983), 2,561.

It goes without saying that this passage is loaded with philosophical terminologies that are hardly seen in the works of the Han and Tang Confucian editors and commentators such as Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127-200) and Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574-648). The thought Zhu Xi expresses in his *Bu Zhuan* 補傳 *Supplement* calls for a philosophical analysis, which will be dealt with in next section.

Here we only focus on the editorial preparations Zhu Xi has made to justify his daring and unconventional approach- providing a *Supplement* to the original text. The decisive step on this regard lies in Zhu Xi's ingenious treatment of the sentence *-ciwei zhiben, ciwei zhizhizhi ye* 此謂知本。此謂知之至也。 That is what is meant by 'knowing the root'. That is what is meant by 'knowing to the utmost'. Here the discerning mind of Zhu Xi becomes prominent, for none of his predecessors find it necessary to differentiate 'zhiben 知本 knowing the root' from 'zhizhizhi 知之至 knowing to the utmost', to the extent that the two phrases should be relocated in two different paragraphs, hence indicating two different notions. Probably due to his philosophically oriented mind, Zhu Xi acquires a rather different understanding which drives him to break the connection between the two phrases, and to regard "*ciwei zhizhizhi ye* 此謂知之至也 That is what is meant by 'knowing to the utmost' " as an independent paragraph which, grammatically speaking, becomes an uncompleted closing sentence, standing for chapter five of the *Zhuan* 傳 *Commentary*.

From a philosophical perspective, it is not hard to see why Zhu Xi has to make a distinction between the two. For Zhu Xi the notion of 'zhizhizhi 知之至 knowing to the utmost' is closely tied up with that of 'zhizhi 致知 the extension of knowledge', as it indicates the result or accomplishment of the first two steps of the great learning; hence the relation between 'zhizhizhi 知之至 knowing to the utmost' and 'zhizhi 致知 the extension of knowledge' is that of end to means. Therefore, 'zhizhizhi 知之至 knowing to the utmost' falls into the category of the eight steps, whereas 'zhiben 知本 knowing the root' does not. Zhu Xi gives no reasons as to why the Cheng brothers pay no attention to such a difference which is so obvious to him.<sup>115</sup> Instead he leaves it as self-evident, and based on his innovative understanding Zhu Xi re-edits this part of the text, making it explicit that the lack of an explanation of the first two steps, the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge, must be attributed to the omitted text. At the

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<sup>115</sup> See Zhu Xi, *DXHW* No. 45, *ZZQS*, 6,524-6.

same time, it necessitates an explanation to refer to, thus making the insertion of a *Supplement* a task to be completed by the Confucian scholars of the day.

Zhu Xi, therefore, contributes a *Bu Zhuan* 補傳 *Supplement* to the existing text as shown above, and through that radical operation he underlines the crucial importance of the first two steps to the whole program of Confucian learning. His *Supplement* undoubtedly becomes the soul of the *Zhuan* 傳 *Commentary*, providing the whole text of *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning* with a central focus which is not found in Cheng Yi's edition.

Nevertheless, Zhu Xi insists that in his writing of *Bu Zhuan* 補傳 *Supplement* he is predominantly indebted to master Cheng, who defines the aim of Confucian learning as attaining sagehood,<sup>116</sup> and makes the point that the great learning must embrace the academic training in classics and the Confucian way of self-cultivation.

To Zhu Xi the provision of a *Bu Zhuan* 補傳 *Supplement* is based entirely on a scrutiny of the structure and the meaning of the whole text, it serves to construct an orderly and comprehensive account of Confucian learning, in the sense that all the eight steps involved in the great learning are adequately elaborated. Moreover, at the end of each chapter of the *Zhuan* 傳 *Commentary*, Zhu Xi summarises what has been done, using the same formula: 'you zhuanzhi... zhang, shi... 右傳之...章, 釋...above is the certain chapter of the *Commentary*, explaining so and so'. Thus, through the effort of the four editors the text of *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning* is eventually transformed into a well-structured, fine piece of work.

## 1.2 Zhu Xi the Commentator: Reinterpreting Scriptures with Philosophical Terms

Distinctive of Zhu Xi's commentary writing is to weave the typical Neo-Confucian philosophical concepts such as *li* 理 Principle, *qi* 氣 cosmic matter or material force, *xin* 心 mind or mind-heart, *xing* 性 nature, and *zhi* 知 intellect or knowing into a line-by-line commentary on the scriptural text. His approach, at least in the case of *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning*, indicates a radical change in comparison to that of the Han Confucian scholars represented by Zheng Xuan.<sup>117</sup> This change is a dramatic shift of focus from the prevailing role of semantics and phonetics in the mainstream of the Han scriptural

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<sup>116</sup> Cheng Yi's influential treatise 'Yanzi Suohao Hexue Lun 顏子所好何學論 What Kind of Learning is Yanzi in Favour of', 'Henan Chengshi Wenji 河南程氏文集 Literary Works of the Two Chengs', *Juan* 8, *Er Cheng Ji* 二程集 *Works of the Two Chengs* (1981), 2,577.

<sup>117</sup> For the differences between Zhu Xi and Zheng Xuan, see Kuang Pengfei 匡鵬飛, 'Lunyu Zheng Zhuan Yu Zhu Xi Zhushi zhi Bijiao 《论语》郑玄与朱熹解释之比较 A Comparison between Zhuxi's Commentary on Analects and that of Zheng Xuan', *Kongzi Yanjiu* 孔子研究 *Confucius Studies* 4 (2001), 106-13.

learning, to the Song Confucian literati's quest for an ontological and cosmological foundation of the Confucian dogmatics. Under this academic climate Zhu Xi's philosophical interpretation of scripture came into being, and it is only in his system that this type of intellectual penetration of scripture finally reaches its maturity.

Admittedly a longstanding exegetical tradition had existed before Zhu Xi, in which had emerged different approaches to Confucian classics. Yet despite all the praxis and methods concerning scriptural exegesis, many scholars today still wonder whether it is appropriate to apply the western term 'hermeneutics'<sup>118</sup> to the study of Confucianism, and more widely to the long history of intellectual development in China.<sup>119</sup> With the thriving of the study of hermeneutics in the tradition of Chinese thought, Zhu Xi's role as a commentator has been taken on board. The complexity involved in Zhu Xi's commentary writing has been expounded at length by recent studies<sup>120</sup> such as Liu Xiaogan 刘笑敢's *Quanshi yu Dingxiang* 诠释与定向 *Exegesis and its Directional Role*, Liu summarise the characteristic of Zhu Xi's scriptural commentary as 'rongguanxing quanshi' 融贯性诠释 coherent and penetrative exegesis' in comparison with the works of other creative commentators such as Wang Bi 王弼 (226-249) and Guo Xiang 郭象 (252-312). According to Liu's observation, Zhu Xi's *Sishu Zhangju Jizhu* 四書章句集註 *Commentaries on The Four Books* is marked by a sophisticated integration of annotation, exegesis and expression of Cheng-Zhu philosophy.<sup>121</sup> In response to the extraordinary exegetical praxis as reflected by this master piece, Zhu Xi particularly spells out the thoughts he gives to the hermeneutical issue which are mostly retained in *Yu Lei* 語類 *Conversations*. As a commentator he not only clarify what is distinctive of the genre of commentary, but also sets up a standard for scriptural exegesis in general

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<sup>118</sup> Even in the West, the meaning of 'hermeneutics' varies in different periods of history; it was not until Schleiermacher that hermeneutics started to be treated as an independent discipline.

<sup>119</sup> Over the last few decades hermeneutics has been the subject of heated discussion by scholars involved in Chinese classical studies both in China and worldwide. The specific research into Chinese exegetical traditions started around the mid-1980s; subsequently the Western term 'hermeneutics' has been applied to this newly emerged scholarly field, thus we have 'Chinese hermeneutics'. In 2001 a conference on Chinese hermeneutics held at Rutgers University resulted in a collection of papers as seen in Cheng-I Tu (ed.), *Interpretation and Intellectual Change* (New Brunswick & London, 2005).

<sup>120</sup> There are a number of valuable papers on this topic collected in Huang Junjie 黄俊傑 (ed.), *Zhongri Sishu Quanshi Chuantong Chutan* 中日四書詮釋傳統初探 *An Initial Study of the Exegetical Tradition concerning The Four Books in China and Japan* (Taipei, 2008), 2 volumes.

<sup>121</sup> See Liu Xiaogan 刘笑敢, *Quanshi yu Dingxiang* 诠释与定向 *Exegesis and its Directional Role* (Beijing, 2009), 208-37.



and endorses a series of hermeneutic rules to reinforce Confucian scriptural learning in pedagogical terms.

These hermeneutical rules include discussions over reading and interpreting scriptural texts. Generally speaking the job of scriptural exegesis is assigned exclusively to a mature mind such as Zhu Xi, whereas the students spend most of their time on reading scriptures under the guidance of a prominent master. Probably for supervision purposes, Zhu Xi gave his students a set of instructions in scriptural reading, entitled *Dushu fa* 讀書法 the *Method of Reading*<sup>122</sup> or to be precise, the *Method of Scriptural Reading*, as it focuses on scriptural learning in Zhu Xi's context.

In spite of the significance of this text, it is open to dispute whether this single treatise really presents a theory of understanding. Some treat it as a documentary proof of the hermeneutical concern in Zhu Xi, while others, such as Wolfgang Kubin, hesitate to link this text with 'hermeneutics'. Kubin argues that Zhu Xi's main concern as reflected here is not the text, but the reader and his reading practice; therefore his *Dushu fa* 讀書法 the *Method of Reading* is far from a theory of understanding. According to Kubin's observations, China neither invented a name for 'the art of understanding', nor has it ever developed a systematic theory of its own. On that account Kubin strongly disputes the application of 'hermeneutics' to the tradition of Chinese thought, to the extent that he takes the term 'Chinese hermeneutics' to be almost as odd as 'a Chimera'.<sup>123</sup> As a response to Kubin's critical stance, Chung-ying Cheng poses a rhetorical question: 'If we can speak of a hermeneutical tradition, can we speak of developing a hermeneutics for the tradition?' Cheng highlights the divergence in our conception of 'hermeneutics': he argues that if we take 'hermeneutics' as an open concept rather than a closed concept hidden specifically in one tradition, then it is possible and justified to construct a different type of 'hermeneutics' or 'art of understanding' from another tradition so long as it does not lack exegetical praxis. From Cheng's perspective the very notion of hermeneutics must presuppose an antecedent or a correlated notion of a hermeneutic tradition and vice versa.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> This text is collected in *Yu Lei* 語類 *Conversations*, Juan 10 and Juan 11, *ZZQS*, 14,313-57.

<sup>123</sup> See Wolfgang Kubin, 'Chinese "Hermeneutics"- A Chimera? - Preliminary Remarks on Differences of Understanding', in Cheng-I Tu (ed.), *Interpretation and Intellectual Change* (New Brunswick and London, 2005), 311-19.

<sup>124</sup> See Chung-ying Cheng, 'Inquiring into the Primary Model: The Yijing and the Structure of the Chinese Hermeneutic Tradition', in Cheng-I Tu (ed.), *Interpretation and Intellectual Change* (2005), 321-41.

Given the heated debate over the legitimacy of ‘Chinese hermeneutics’ as shown above, in particular Kubin’s opinion of Zhu Xi’s *Dushu fa* 讀書法 the *Method of Reading*,<sup>125</sup> we are compelled constantly to remind ourselves of the fundamental difference between Zhu Xi’s practical concern with the hermeneutical issues in his time, and the current debate over ‘Chinese hermeneutics’ which basically concerns how to justify (like Chung-ying Cheng) or refute (like Wolfgang Kubin) this newly emerged research trend according to the modern academic standard. Bearing that in mind, we will avoid directly imposing any modern theory of hermeneutics upon Zhu Xi, but focus instead on a textual study and analysis. Fixing our attention strictly on the original source, we will find that Zhu Xi’s hermeneutical concern is chiefly derived from his exegetical practice as a creative commentator, while also expressing his pedagogical concern as a prominent teacher, and that the two aspects boil down to a deep-rooted spiritual concern to take scriptural learning as the path to self-realisation; in other words, scriptural learning paves the way for one’s attainment of sagehood. In that sense, it is not appropriate to read Zhu Xi through the lens of Gadamer or even to extract a theory of ‘philosophical hermeneutics’ from Zhu Xi’s work. This does not mean that we must abandon the term ‘hermeneutics’ altogether in studying Zhu Xi; the employment of the term will do no harm, so long as we are aware of the possible confusion over terminologies, and make it clear that ‘hermeneutics’ in this study is used to mean ‘hermeneutic considerations’ or ‘hermeneutic thinking’, which is closely tied up with the practice of reading and interpreting scriptures.

### 1.2.1 Zhu Xi’s Method of Scriptural Reading

Perhaps the most distinct impact of the Song scholarship on Confucian tradition has been its sustained emphasis on a philosophical understanding of, rather than a literal or philological approach to, the Confucian classics. That spirit gains a transparent expression in Zhu Xi’s predecessor Cheng Yi: ‘*you jing qiong li* 由經窮理 probing the Principle through scriptures.’<sup>126</sup> So far as this pronouncement goes, it is clear that in the eyes of the Song Confucians, the scriptural texts left by the ancient sages should be treated as the means to pursue the ultimate goal, namely *li* 理 the Principle. Distinctive

<sup>125</sup> It is beyond the scope of this study to participate in the debate over ‘Chinese hermeneutics’, however relevant the topic, nor is it necessary to refute Kubin’s downplaying of Zhu Xi’s *Method of Reading* here, as he simply uses this text as an example to dispute the term ‘Chinese hermeneutics’. A detailed analysis of this text will be presented below.

<sup>126</sup> Cheng Yi, ‘Henai Chengshi Yishu 河南程氏遺書 Posthumous Work of the Two Cheng Masters’, *Juan* 15, *Er Cheng Ji* 二程集 *Works of the Two Chengs* (1981), 1,158.

of Zhu Xi's approach is the sort of systematic intellectual penetration of scripture, but the word 'intellectualism' does not suffice to illustrate the complex fusion of hermeneutic considerations and philosophical thoughts in Zhu Xi. In Neo-Confucian context especially with regard to the Cheng-Zhu school, *li* 理 the Principle is encapsulated in Confucian scriptures and at the same time inheres in the original state of *ren xing* 人性 human nature. Therefore the philosophical approach, which aims to appropriate *li* 理 the Principle as encapsulated in scriptures, also leads to a realisation of the goodness rooted in human nature.

The Song masters no longer believe in the mastery of language will be sufficient for a comprehension of the profound meaning of a text. Likewise one's comprehension of the literary meaning of a scripture does not necessarily result in a perfect understanding of the message of the ancient sages contained in the scriptural text. That should be the common ground shared by the Neo-Confucian masters in the Song despite their difference in research interest and method. Overall they adopt an approach to scripture which is in stark contrast to that of the Han scriptural learning. Among the various schools within Neo-Confucianism, *li xue* 理學 the school of the Principle represented by Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi attaches more significance to the academic training in the Confucian classics, in comparison with its counterpart *xin xue* 心學 (the school of mind).<sup>127</sup> Zhu Xi, in particular, furthers the necessity for a systematic and intensive classical learning. Through his effort the practice of scriptural reading is transformed into an essential element of the Confucian learning. Qian Mu 錢穆, on the basis of his extensive study of the history of Chinese thought, comes to the conclusion that neither the Han/Tang Confucians nor the Qing Confucian scholars are as competent as Zhu in respect to his insightful exposition of exegetical method.<sup>128</sup> Qian's remarks highlight Zhu Xi's scholarly contribution to the theory of scriptural exegesis in Confucian history.

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<sup>127</sup> The conventional division of the two schools has, to a great extent, oversimplified the whole picture of the Song Confucian scholarship. However, as a way of delineating the historical development of the Confucian thought, it is overall a better version than Mou Zongsan's classification, which is heavily reliant on an overwhelming preference for the method promoted by Mencius.

With regard to the difference in scriptural exegesis between the two schools represented by Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming, see Yang Rubin 楊儒賓, 'Shuiyue yu Jiji 水月與記籍: 理學家如何詮釋經典 Moon in the Water and Registry of Account: how do the Neo-Confucian masters interpret scriptures', in Li Minghui 李明輝 (ed.), *Zhongguo Jingdian Quanshi Chuantong-Ruxue Pian* 中國經典詮釋傳統-儒學篇 *The Tradition of Scriptural Exegesis in China – Confucianism* (2002), 158-92.

<sup>128</sup> See Qian Mu 錢穆, *Qian Binsi Xianshen Quanjì* 錢賓四先生全集 *Complete Works of Qian Mu* (Taipei, 1998), 14,257.

Within Zhu Xi's system the method of *dushu* 讀書 scriptural reading functions as an exemplar of how to put the teaching of *gewu* 格物 the investigation of things into practice.<sup>129</sup> Zhu Xi has no doubt as to the essential role of scriptural learning in personal cultivation; it is almost self-evident to him that the practice of scriptural learning will have an impact upon the practitioner.<sup>130</sup> In that sense the lectures Zhu Xi delivered on *dushu fa* 讀書法 the *Method of Scriptural Reading* also serve moral and spiritual purposes, it is intended to rectify the over-subjective attitude and idealistic approach embodied by *xin xue* 心學 (the school of mind) and *chan zong* 禪宗 the school of Zen Buddhism in extreme form. Hence the following brief general guideline was given to all Confucian students:

With regard to the method of scriptural reading, I believe one should cover a broad realm, gain a thorough understanding and know the details. As to my personal view, I would go for details rather than brevity, for a lower rather than a higher level, for clumsiness rather than cunningness, and for something that lies in a nearer rather than a further place.<sup>131</sup>

Zhu Xi deliberately chooses strong words to express his contempt for the blind adherence to subjectivity, simplicity and abstractness revealed by many Confucians of the day. The aforementioned principles are meant to ward off the defective approach promoted by his contemporaries. In order to tackle this problem in theoretical and practical terms, he provides the students with an alternative that is more constructive and concrete. Although his views in this regard are scattered among his literal and philosophical compositions, a number of fundamental rules are repeatedly addressed, which gives us a clue as to the intellectual climate of the day as well as the questions Zhu Xi bears in mind whilst endorsing his method of reading.

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In his *Zhuzi Xin Xue An* 朱子新學案 *A New Anthology of Master Zhu*, Qian also presents detailed discussion of Zhu's hermeneutical principles under the title 'Zhuzi Lun Jiejing 朱子論解經 Master Zhu on Scriptural Exegesis', *ibid.* 257-337.

<sup>129</sup> Zhu Xi, ZZYL, Juan 10: '讀書是格物一事。今且須逐段子細玩味，反來覆去，或一日，或兩日，只看一段，則這一段便是我底。腳踏這一段了，又看第二段。如此逐旋捱去，捱得多後，卻見頭頭道理都到。大雅錄' ZZQS, 14,319-20.

<sup>130</sup> Zhu Xi, Xingong Biandian Zouzha Er 行宮便殿奏劄二: '蓋為學之道，莫先於窮理：窮理之要，必在於讀書。' ZZWJ, Juan 14, ZZQS, 20,668.

Zhu Xi, Da Jiang Duanbo 答江端伯 *Reply to Jiang Duanbo*: '示喻為學之方，足見留意事物。未見不可逆料，誠如所論。唯有因聖賢之所已言者而求之，為庶幾耳。故為學不可以不讀書，而讀書之法又當熟讀沈思，反覆涵泳，銖積寸累，久自見功，不惟理明，心亦自定。' ZZWJ, Juan 64, ZZQS, 23,3123.

<sup>131</sup> Zhu Xi, ZZYL, Juan 10: '讀書，須是遍布周滿。某嘗以為寧詳毋略，寧下毋高，寧拙毋巧，寧近毋遠。方子錄' ZZQS, 14,317.

As mentioned above there has been a longstanding exegetical tradition before Zhu Xi, his method of reading, therefore, draws heavily on the method followed by the commentators in the Han and Tang Dynasties. Like his predecessors Zhu Xi calls for a faithful and submissive attitude towards scripture. He maintains that one must first grasp the literal meaning of a text before moving on to the philosophical connotations. In *Yu Lei* 語類 *Conversations* Zhu Xi exhorts his students to first read the text and seek for the literal meaning, and only then to look at the commentaries. He mentions that people of the day mistakenly tend to do otherwise, fixing their eyes on what is beyond the text.<sup>132</sup> Due to obliviousness to the literal meaning and a deficiency in comprehension, many have distorted the scriptures. Zhu Xi repeatedly warns students that: ‘In handling the words of the ancients, it is always the one who does not understand it that jumps to conclusions, which is particularly harmful. Because in so doing one stands no chance of acquiring the truth; it is nothing but a waste of time.’<sup>133</sup> Therefore, being faithful to the scripture is of crucial importance. This golden rule should be applied at all times.

When reading a scripture, one must keep a receptive mind, never rush into your own opinion. Do not move to the next paragraph unless you have fully understood this one. One must behave like a judge who, in dealing with a legal case, must first listen to the whole story before issuing a verdict.<sup>134</sup>

That should be the attitude of a student in reading scriptures. The ‘receptive mind’ (*xu xin* 虛心) here is an ideal state of mind in which preconceived ideas and prejudice are suspended, so that a perfect reception of the text is possible. A man with a receptive mind is supposed to be impartial and always prepares himself to listen rather than judge. In other words, he is capable of suspending pre-judgement of any kind and of listening to the voice of a scripture with all his mind and heart. In the dialogue with a scripture, he is more inclined to be turned by it than to turn the scripture. That is what Zhu Xi means by a receptive and objective mind, which is the prerequisite to understanding a scripture. In contrast, being arbitrary and subjectivistic can be catastrophic, because it blocks the way to assimilate the teaching of the ancient sages. Zhu Xi affirms that there

<sup>132</sup> Zhu Xi, *ZZYL*, *Juan* 11: ‘讀書，須從文義上尋，次則看註解。今人卻於文義外尋索。蓋卿錄’ *ZZQS*, 14,351.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.* *Juan* 11: ‘看前人文字，未得其意，便容易立說，殊害事。蓋既不得正理，又枉費心力。不若虛心靜看，即涵養、究索之功，一舉而兩得之也。時舉錄’ *ZZQS*, 14,335.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.* *Juan* 11: ‘凡看書，須虛心看，不要先立說。看一段有下落了，然後又看一段。須如人受詞訟，聽其說盡，然後方可決斷。泳錄’ *ZZQS*, 14,335.

is no possibility for a man to take in the teaching of the sages unless he first puts aside his own opinions.<sup>135</sup>

However the ability to assimilate the message of a scripture takes more than a receptive mind: it entails a life-long process of mental engagement with scriptures. Zhu Xi paints a vivid picture in this regard. “Reading scripture is like a valiant general fighting a fierce battle or a ruthless officer investigating a legal case, who cannot stop until he gets to the bottom of it.”<sup>136</sup> Moreover “one ought to be captivated by the fascinating parts when reading a scripture, and to pull all one’s might together, never feel sleepy as if being threatened by a knife or a sword.”<sup>137</sup> From the perspective of Zhu Xi, setting the mind upon a scripture means fighting a bloody war concerning life and death; thus the reader has no choice but to be utterly ruthless and fierce in wrestling with those questions and puzzles with which he or she is constantly obsessed. It is, after all, a solitary internal struggle which can only be carried out by an extremely inquisitive mind.

Typical to Song Confucian masters in particular Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi reading is another word for thinking, to read a scripture means to think it through. On this respect Zhu Xi gives the instruction that whilst reading: “One need to pause and ponder upon the seemingly bland paragraphs; not until all kinds of doubts arise to the extent that one cannot eat or sleep, will a rapid progress then be made.”<sup>138</sup> Zhu Xi makes the point that thoroughly understanding a book necessitates independent thinking. This is because in

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<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.* Juan 11: ‘讀書須是虛心切己。虛心，方能得聖賢意；切己，則聖賢之言不為虛說。看文字須是虛心。莫先立己意，少刻多錯了。又曰：虛心切己。虛心則見道理明；切己，自然體認得出。舉錄’ ZZQS, 14,335.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.* Juan 10: ‘看文字，須是如猛將用兵，直是鏖戰一陣；如酷吏治獄，直是推勘到底，決是不恕他，方得。夔孫錄’ ZZQS, 14,316.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.* Juan 10: ‘看文字，須大段著精彩看。聳起精神，樹起筋骨，不要困，如有刀劍在後一般！淳錄’ ZZQS, 14,316.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.* Juan 10: ‘學者讀書，須是於無味處當致思焉。至於群疑並興，寢食俱廢，乃能驟進。賀孫錄’ ZZQS, 14,315.

Zhu Xi’s emphasis on the hardship involved in scriptural reading bears resemblance to the tips that a Zen master sometimes gives to his disciples concerning their persistent quest for the meaning of *shengsi* 生死 life and death. The words of master Fa Yan 法演禪師 (?-1104) as shown below give a good example of this.

《东山演禅师送徒行脚》：‘須將生死二字，貼在額頭上，討取箇分曉。如只隨群作隊，打哄過日，他時間老子打算飯錢，莫道我不曾說與爾來。若是做工夫，須要時時檢點，刻刻提撕。那裏是得力處，那裏是不得力處。那裏是打失處，那裏是不打失處。有一等，纔上蒲團，便打瞌睡，及至醒來，胡思亂想。纔下蒲團，便說雜話。如此辦道，直至彌勒下生，也未得入手。須是猛著精彩，提箇話頭，晝參夜參，與他廝捱。不可坐在無事甲裏，又不可蒲團上死坐。若雜念轉門轉多，輕輕放下，下地走一遭。再上蒲團，開兩眼。掙兩拳，豎起脊梁，依前提起話頭，便覺清涼。如一鍋沸湯攪一杓冷水相似。如此做工夫，定有到家時節。’ See Zhu Hong 祿宏 (ed.), *Changuan Cejin* 禪關策進 *Method for Making Progress in Zen Meditation*.

<http://www.baus-ebs.org/sutra/fan-read/003/03-022.htm>

reading one will be confronted with some clearly different or even contradictory interpretations given by the past masters, which await an original mind to offer a solution.<sup>139</sup> Thus thinking becomes an integral part of reading, and anyone who is lazy in thinking will surely fall short of Zhu Xi's standard. Following this renewed concept of reading, Zhu Xi further clarifies the concrete intellectual operations involved; for instance, 'to discern the right from the wrong',<sup>140</sup> and to compare the differences and similarities between various perspectives, and that is the most spectacular part in reading a book.<sup>141</sup> After being puzzled and confused, one may come up with some new ideas, thereby reach the point to present a comment or critique, even when it alludes to the work of the previous masters. To Zhu Xi, all the expert views about the meaning of a scripture stand apart from the scripture itself and are open to question.

In addition, Zhu Xi highlights the kind of meditative reading which reflects the influence of Buddhism on Neo-Confucian masters in Song Dynasty. Reading scripture in that sense is a form of meditation which requires focus in terms of body, mind and spirit. Zhu Xi insists that 'in reading a scripture, one has first to keep the body in a ready posture – sitting up and pulling oneself together – then focus one's attention on the scripture and recite it at a slow pace and in a lower tone. Meanwhile, one ought to keep a clear and receptive mind so as to immerse oneself in scripture and obtain a sympathetic understanding of it by associating one's life experience with the content of scripture.'<sup>142</sup> In that way, one will be able to assimilate the meaning of a scripture.<sup>143</sup>

<sup>139</sup> Zhu Xi, *ZZYL*, Juan 11: '許多道理，孔子恁地說一番，孟子恁地說一番，子思又恁地說一番，都恁地懸空掛在那裡。自家須自去體認，始得。賀孫錄' *ZZQS*, 14,345.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.* Juan 11: '讀書而講究其義理，判別其是非，臨事即此理。' *ZZQS*, 14,339.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.* Juan 11: '凡看文字，諸家說有異同處，最可觀。謂如甲說如此，且扞扯住甲，窮盡其詞；乙說如此，且扞扯住乙，窮盡其詞。兩家之說既盡，又參考而窮究之，必有一真是者出矣。學蒙錄' *ZZQS*, 14,350.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.* Juan 11: '大凡讀書，且要讀，不可只管思。口中讀，則心中閒，而義理自出。某之始學，亦如是爾，更無別法。節錄

學者讀書，須要斂身正坐，緩視微吟，虛心涵泳，切己省一作'體'察。

又云：讀一句書，須體察這一句，我將來甚處用得。又云：文字是底固當看，不是底也當看；精底固當看，粗底也當看。震錄' *ZZQS*, 14,334.

<sup>143</sup> As pointed out by Cheng Lisheng, what Zhu Xi has prescribed here as the method of reading actually has little in common with the modern theory of hermeneutics. It is basically designed for a group of readers who share the same faith in a scripture that is sacred to them. See Cheng Lisheng 陈立胜, 'Zhuzi Dushufa: Quanshi Yu Quanshi zhiwai 朱子读书法：诠释与诠释之外 Zhu Xi's Method of Scriptural Reading: Exegesis and beyond Exegesis', in Li Minghui 李明辉 (ed.), *Rujia Jingdian Quanshi Fangfa* 儒家经典诠释方法 *The Method of Scriptural Exegesis in Confucianism* (Taipei, 2003), 107-34.

Like the Cheng brothers<sup>144</sup> and his contemporary Lu Xiangshan<sup>145</sup>, Zhu Xi also addresses the importance of *zi de* 自得 getting it oneself.<sup>146</sup> With regard to the cultivation of an original mind, Zhu Xi seems to have a lot to learn from the methodology of the Zen masters. In private conversations with his favourite students Zhu Xi time and again reveals his deep appreciation of Zen on this respect. For instance, he points out to the Confucian students that the Zen methodology holds a significant advantage, one that is paradoxically associated with its counter-language disposition, because in Zen the abandoning of commentary on scripture gives the Zen practitioners no opportunity to follow other people's thinking; each individual has to work out the meaning of the ineffable on his own. This explains why in the circle of Buddhism there always stands a qualified successor, whereas in Confucianism and Daoism the succession of the divine lineage is sometimes cut off.<sup>147</sup> He also recognises a potential harm that a commentary, including his own, may do to learners, in the sense that the commentary will not be well received if it is presented to an unprepared mind. To a person who has no doubts and questions in mind, the answers provided by a commentary will deprive him of the opportunity to question the scriptures in his own way. By contrast, the methodology of Zen forces one to think independently and to work out the answers on one's own, as the Zen masters refuse to explain anything at all.

Zhu Xi makes it clear that one should not be content with a word-by-word comprehension of a text. The reading of a scripture is to be conducted in the sense of *qiong li* 窮理 probing the Principle, which requires introspective thinking on the part of the reader, who seeks intently the relevance of the scripture to his personal

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<sup>144</sup> Cheng Yi: '說書必非古意，轉使人薄。學者須是潛心積慮，優游涵養，使之自得。今一日說盡，只是教得薄。' 'Henan Chengshi Yishu 河南程氏遺書 Posthumous Work of the Two Cheng Masters', *Juan 15, Er Cheng Ji* 二程集 *Works of the Two Chongs* (1981), 1,168.

<sup>145</sup> The concept of *zi de* 自得 getting it oneself characterises the method of learning advocated by Lu Xiangshan, who openly proclaimed that he had worked out the essence of Confucianism by himself whilst reading *The Book of Mencius* ('因讀孟子而自得之'). See *Lu Xiangshan Quanjì* 陸象山全集 *The Complete Work of Lu Xiangshan* (Beijing, 1992), 308, *Juan 35*. [The page number varies in different editions, but the number for *Juan* never changes.]

<sup>146</sup> Wm. Theodore de Bary, *Learning for One's Self: essays on the individual in Neo-Confucian Thought* (New York, 1991), 8.

<sup>147</sup> Zhu Xi, *ZZYL, Juan 14*: '學者且去熟讀大學正文了，又子細看章句。或問未要看，俟有疑處，方可去看。又曰：某解書不合太多。又先準備學者，為他設疑說了。他未曾疑到這上，先與說了，所以致得學者看得容易了。聖人云：『不慎不啟，不悛不發。舉一隅不以三隅反，則不復也。』須是教他疑三朝五日了，方始與說他，便通透。更與從前所疑慮，也會因此觸發，工夫都在許多思慮不透處。而今卻是看見成解底，都無疑了。吾儒與老莊學皆無傳，惟有釋氏常有人。蓋他一切辦得不說，都待別人自去敲磕，自有個通透處。只是吾儒又無這不說底，若如此，少間差異了。賀孫錄' *ZZQS*, 14,429.



circumstance.<sup>148</sup> In searching for the relevance of a scripture to one's own experience in real life, one will be able to make a personal appropriation of that scripture. Only then does a scripture cease to be external and start to be meaningful to its reader, in other words, the meaning of a scripture is internalised. The exercise of scriptural reading will have little impact on a person unless he works out his personal affinity with that scripture and makes sense of it on his own. As a result, the distance between the scripture and the reader will be gradually diminished, to the extent that the words of the ancient texts become as vivid and meaningful as if they issued from the bottom of the reader's heart.<sup>149</sup>

In both *Yu Lei* 語類 *Conversations* and *Wen Ji* 文集 *Literary Works*, Zhu Xi repeatedly attaches importance to the accumulative process of learning. He believes that provided the accumulation of the effort in learning reaches maturity, one will be able to achieve self-transformation, in the sense that one's *qibing* 氣稟 physio-psychical constitution will be transformed due to the effective impact of learning on the learner.<sup>150</sup> Zhu Xi admits it is very hard to achieve such a self-transformation, and explains to his pupils that probably due to the difficulty in this matter, Mencius seldom mentions the issue of *qibing* 氣稟 physio-psychical constitution; instead he only lays stress on the goodness within human nature and says 'everyone can become a sage just like Yao and Shun'. Should one concentrate and work hard, the defects in one's temperament will automatically be diminished, and the effort of self-cultivation will automatically bear fruit.<sup>151</sup> Zhu Xi maintains that his emphasis on the way of learning which aims to transform man's *qibing* 氣稟 physio-psychical constitution does not contradict the traditional Confucian belief in the goodness of human nature. Indeed, it is only through transforming *qibing* 氣稟 physio-psychical constitution by means of learning, that the innate goodness can be realised, as had once been achieved by the ancient sages.

Zhu Xi takes learning as a three-phase process which is particularly reflected in one's praxis of reading. Accordingly one should start with *yue* 約 brevity, then moving on to

<sup>148</sup> Zhu Xi, *ZZYL*, *Juan* 11: '讀書窮理，當體之於身。凡平日所講貫窮究者，不知逐日常見得在心目間否。不然，則隨文逐義，趕趁期限，不見悅處，恐終無益。蓋卿錄' *ZZQS*, 14,331.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.* *Juan* 10: '尹先生門人言尹先生讀書云：“耳順心得，如誦己言。”功夫到後，誦聖賢言語，都一似自己言語。廣錄' *ZZQS*, 14,328.

<sup>150</sup> A.C. Graham terms it the 'permeation of the *chi* (*qi*) by *li*'; see his paper 'What is New in Cheng-Chu Theory of Human Nature', in Wing-tsit Chan (ed.), *Chu Hsi and Neo-Confucianism* (1986), 154.

<sup>151</sup> Zhu Xi, *ZZYL*, *Juan* 4: '人之為學，卻是要變化氣稟，然極難變化。如“孟子道性善”，不言氣稟，只言“人皆可以為堯舜”。若勇猛直前，氣稟之偏自消，功夫自成，故不言氣稟。璘錄' *ZZQS*, 14,198.

the middle part which covers a broad and vast region, and returning to *yue* 約 brevity at the end.<sup>152</sup> Given the intellectual context Zhu Xi lived in, this theory is probably constructed with an intention to rectify the academic trend at that time, for it apparently attempts to strike a balance between two extremes – an over-emphasis on simplicity as represented by Lu Xiangshan<sup>153</sup> and his school located in the area of *Jiangxi* 江西, and the focus on complexity and erudition in historical studies which probably refers to his contemporary Confucian scholars in the area of *Zhedong* 浙東 (Eastern Zhejiang), from Zhu Xi's point of view both have missed the point of learning.<sup>154</sup> Instead of opting for one extreme or the other, the authentic way of Confucian learning should embrace the three distinct stages: from simplicity to complexity and back to simplicity. This means that one who embarks upon scriptural learning should bear in mind the aspiration for the message of the ancient sages: having set one's mind on seeking the ultimate truth, one then proceeds to the exploration of the details; after going through the complexity of the details, one finally comes back to the initial point of simplicity with a thorough understanding of the complexity. To illustrate this point Zhu Xi points out the difference between scriptures which are supposed to be out of the hand of ancient sages and those historical documents which are not free of mistakes, nonetheless he believes *tian li* 天理 the heavenly Principle remains intact even in historical books, thus historical studies can be *sheng xue* 聖學 the learning of the sages so long as the sacred message contained in historical documents are comprehended.<sup>155</sup>

With a particular concern with the prevailing trend towards simplicity and brevity, Zhu Xi lays more emphasis on the vast area of the middle stage, and calls for an attentive attitude toward details, in order to broaden the horizon of the learner. To Zhu Xi the most harm a teacher can do to a student is to provide him with a brief abstract

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<sup>152</sup> Zhu Xi, *ZZYL*, *Juan* 11: '為學須是先立大本。其初甚約，中間一節甚廣大，到末梢又約。可學錄' *ZZQS*, 14,345.

<sup>153</sup> For a discussion of the debate between Zhu Xi and Lu Xiangshan concerning pedagogy and other issues such as the importance of reading the classics, see Hoyt Cleveland Tillman, *Confucian Discourse and Chu Hsi's Ascendancy* (Honolulu, 1992), 202-34.

<sup>154</sup> Zhu Xi, *ZZYL*, *Juan* 11: '孟子曰：博學而詳說之，將以反說約也。故必先觀論孟大學中庸，以考聖賢之意；讀史，以考存亡治亂之跡；讀諸子百家，以見其駁雜之病。其節目自有次序，不可逾越。近日學者多喜從約，而不於博求之。不知不求於博，何以考驗其約！如某人好約，今只做得一僧，了得一身。又有專於博上求之，而不反其約，今日考一制度，明日又考一制度，空於用處作工夫，其病又甚於約而不博者。要之，均是無益。可學錄' *ZZQS*, 14,345.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.* *Juan* 11: '浩曰：趙書記云：“自有見後，只是看六經語孟，其他史書雜學皆不必看。”其說謂買金須問賣金人，雜賣店中那得金銀。不必問也。曰：如此，即不見古今成敗，便是荊公之學。書那有不可讀者？只怕無許多心力讀得。六經是三代以上之書，曾經聖人手，全是天理。三代以下文字有得失，然而天理卻在這邊自若也。要有主，覷得破，皆是學。浩錄' *ZZQS*, 14,347.

summary before that student has acquired the slightest idea of any concrete content. Zhu Xi therefore sets a rigid academic standard for his students to refer to. We read:

In reading scriptures, one must first master the text, then learn the notes by heart, and finally acquire a thorough understanding of the whole piece including the details. He must be familiar with whatever appears in the notes such as the meaning of a term, the particular thing it refers to, what it may imply or to which part of a certain scripture it is related. Only after he knows a scripture to the extent that he feels as if it were his own words, can he ponder over its subtle significance and penetrate upward [to reach the level of metaphysical questions]. Otherwise, he is only working on fallacious speculations, just like those who conduct learning with the purpose of passing the civil service exams, which means he is not learning for his own sake.<sup>156</sup>

This seems to be too demanding a standard to live up to. The point of making such a requirement is to exhort all to cultivate a conscientious attitude towards scriptures. This means that any comments or remarks on scriptures must be based on a thorough understanding of the details.<sup>157</sup> On one occasion, coming across a student who knew nothing about *Shi Jing* 詩經 *The Book of Poetry* apart from the most popular comment on it – ‘*le er buyin, ai er bushang* 樂而不淫，哀而不傷 joy with no lust, sorrow with no distress’ – Zhu Xi made a mockery of him: ‘If you add another three words – ‘*si wuxie* 思無邪 no evil thought’ – to it, with the eleven words you may complete the whole of *Mao Shi* 毛詩 (*The Book of Poetry as Commented by the School of Mao*); the remaining three hundred pieces of poems could then be treated as dregs.’<sup>158</sup>

Clearly, Zhu Xi sees learning as a long and tedious process, there is no other way to perfect learning than to be extremely patient and attentive to the details. He takes hardship for granted and despises those who intend to seek a short-cut.<sup>159</sup> Nonetheless the intensive and rigid academic training in classics as Zhu Xi thus commanded is

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<sup>156</sup> Zhu Xi, ZZYL, Juan 11: ‘學者觀書，先須讀得正文，記得註解，成誦精熟。注中訓釋文意、事物、名義，發明經指，相穿紐處，一一認得，如自己做出來底一般，方能玩味反覆，向上有透處。若不如此，只是虛設議論，如舉業一般，非為己之學也。敬仲錄’ ZZQS, 14,349.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.* Juan 10: ‘學者初看文字，只見得個渾淪物事。久久看作三兩片，以至於十數片，方是長進。如庖丁解牛，目視無全牛，是也。人傑錄’ ZZQS, 14,315.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.* Juan 11: ‘曾見有人說詩，問他關雎篇，於其訓詁名物全未曉，便說：“樂而不淫，哀而不傷。”某因說與他道：公而今說詩，只消這八字，更添“思無邪”三字，共成十一字，便是一部毛詩了。其他三百篇，皆成渣滓矣！敬仲錄’ ZZQS, 14,349.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.* Juan 10: ‘為學讀書，須是耐煩細意去理會，切不可粗心。若曰何必讀書，自有個捷徑法，便是誤人底深坑也。未見道理時，恰如數重物色包裹在里許，無緣可以便見得。須是今日去了一重，又見得一重；明日又去了一重，又見得一重。去盡皮，方見肉；去盡肉，方見骨；去盡鼻，方見髓。使粗心大氣不得。廣錄’ ZZQS, 14,326.

deemed after all a means rather than an end, on the ground that an effective method of scriptural learning should and could lead to a radical transformation of one's *qizhi zhixing* 氣質之性 (physical nature). Likewise, a defective approach to scripture will be detrimental to a learner, in the sense that it is very likely to trigger or intensify certain shortcomings in his personality. This line of thought is openly expressed in his debate with the Lu brothers over Zhu Dunyi 周敦頤's *Taiji Tushuo* 太極圖說 (*Explanation of the Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate*), surrounding the concept of *wu ji* 無極 (the Non-Ultimate).<sup>160</sup>

### 1.2.2 Rules for the Interpreting of Scriptures

A few decades before Zhu Xi, Cheng Yi made an account of the intellectual scenario of the Northern Song. He divides the scholars of his time into three groups due to their difference in research interest: literature, philology and the learning of Confucians, those who indulge in the heretical teaching of Buddhism and Taoism are not counted in.<sup>161</sup> Likewise Cheng Yi detects three kinds of problems his contemporary learners are obsessed with, namely indulging in literature, being attached to philology and being perplexed by heretical teachings.<sup>162</sup> He also points out that the words of the sages contained in scriptures are always concise; whereas what has been composed by people of later generations is not necessarily needed.<sup>163</sup> In Cheng Yi critical remarks are spotted here and there, but we do not see a systematic elaboration on the exegetical method that he himself intends to promote.<sup>164</sup>

<sup>160</sup> Zhu Xi, 'zhi Suoshan shu 致梭山書 Letter to Lu Suoshan': '熹之愚陋，竊願尊兄少賜反復，寬心遊意，必使於其所說，如出於吾之所為者，而無纖芥之疑，然後可以發言立論，而斷其可否，則其為辯也不煩，而理之所在，無不得矣。若一以急迫之意求之，則於察理已不能精，而於彼之情又不詳盡，則徒為紛紛，而雖慙不差，不可得矣。然只在迫急，即是來論所謂氣質之弊，蓋所論之差處，雖不在此，然其所以差者，則原於此，而不可誣矣。' *Id.*, 'zhi Xiangshan shu 致象山書 Letter to Lu Xiangshan': '況理既未明，則於人之言，恐亦未免有未盡其意者，又安可以遽絀古書為不足信，而直任胸臆之所裁乎？'

See Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 and Quan Zuwang 全祖望 (eds.), *Song-Yuan Xue An* 宋元學案 *Anthology of Song-Yuan Confucianism* (Beijing, 1986), *Juan* 57, 3, 1866-8.

<sup>161</sup> Cheng Yi: '古之學者一，今之學者三，異端不與焉。一曰文章之學，二曰訓詁之學，三曰儒者之學。欲趨道，舍儒者之學不可。' 'Henai Chengshi Yishu 河南程氏遺書 Posthumous Work of the Two Cheng Masters', *Juan* 18, *Er Cheng Ji* 二程集 *Works of the Two Chengs* (1981), 1, 187.

<sup>162</sup> Cheng Yi: "今之學者有三弊：一溺於文章，二牽於訓詁，三惑於異端。苟無此三者，則將何歸？必趨於道矣。" *Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> Cheng Yi: "聖人六經，皆不得已而作；如宋相陶冶，一不制，則生人之用息。後世之言，無之不為缺，有之徒為贅，雖多何益也？聖人言雖約，無有包含不盡處。" *Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>164</sup> For details concerning the differences between Zhu Xi and the two Chengs in this regard, see Qian Mu 錢穆, *Zhuzi Xin Xue An* 朱子新學案 *A New Anthology of Master Zhu*, in *Qian Binsi Xianshen Quanji* 錢賓四先生全集 *Complete Works of Qian Mu* (1998), 14, 339-569.

In comparison there is remarkable advancement in theoretical construction in Zhu Xi, indeed Zhu Xi's commentary writing comes along with a theory of scriptural exegesis which is mostly seen in *Yu Lei* 語類 *Conversations*, and is also touched upon in *Sishu Huo Wen* 四書或問 *Questions and Answers concerning The Four Books*. In that respect his *Sishu Zhangju Jizhu* 四書章句集註 *Commentary on The Four Books* especially *Daxue Zhangju* 大學章句 *Commentary on The Great Learning*<sup>165</sup> is the embodiment of the exegetical rules he puts forth.

With regard to the rules for scriptural interpretation, Zhu Xi fully endorses a receptive and submissive stance towards scriptures and proscribes any traces of arbitrary judgement and subjectivistic interpretation. He summarises the typical problems of his contemporary commentators into four categories: uplifting the original text to make it higher; excavating it to make it deeper; pushing it to make it reach further; and muddling it to make it obscure.<sup>166</sup> These are all substantial mistakes and should be abstained from at all costs. To him the assimilating of a scripture is crucially conditioned by a full commitment to the words of the sages, which should be applied under all circumstances. This kind of unconditional commitment to scriptures is regarded as a predominant academic standard for scriptural interpretation, to be employed to scrutinise any existing commentary or sub-commentary on a scripture. Zhu Xi expounds it in the following three points:

- i. The relation of a commentary or sub-commentary to a scripture is that of a slave or servant to a master.<sup>167</sup>
- ii. The main job of writing a commentary is to untie the knot, to decode the words of the sages so as to make them more accessible.<sup>168</sup>
- iii. The inclusion of a treatise in the commentary is to be avoided.<sup>169</sup>

<sup>165</sup> As a genre of commentary, *zhangju* 章句 usually focuses on the syntactic and semantic analysis of chapters, sections, sentences and phrases of an ancient text. In his treatment of *The Great Learning*, Zhu Xi evidently takes account of the philosophical interpretation; as a result, his *Commentary on The Great Learning* goes beyond the traditional framework of *zhangju* 章句.

<sup>166</sup> Zhu Xi, *ZZYL*, *Juan* 11: ‘今之談經者，往往有四者之病：本卑也，而抗之使高；本淺也，而鑿之使深；本近也，而推之使遠；本明也，而必使至於晦，此今日談經之大患也。蓋卿錄’ *ZZQS*, 14,351.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.* *Juan* 11: ‘聖經字若個主人，解者猶若奴僕。今人不識主人，且因奴僕通名，方識得主人，畢竟不如經字也。泳錄’ *ZZQS*, 14,351.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.* *Juan* 11: ‘解經謂之解者，只要解釋出來。將聖賢之語解開了，庶易讀。泳錄’ ‘解經當如破的。方子錄’ *ZZQS*, 14,351.

<sup>169</sup> Zhu Xi points out that even master Cheng's commentary is tainted by this defect. See *ZZYL*, *Juan* 11: ‘傳註，惟古註不作文，卻好看。只隨經句分說，不離經意，最好。疏亦然。今人解書，且圖要作文，又加辨說，百般生疑。故其文雖可讀，而經意殊遠。程子易傳亦成作文，說了又說。故今人觀者更不看本經，只讀傳，亦非所以使人思也。大雅錄’ *ZZQS*, 14,351.

The interpretation of a scripture must be based entirely on the scriptural text, and be kept as close to it as possible.<sup>170</sup> The words of the sages are not delivered at random; rather the structure and order are subtly presented and demand extreme attentiveness.<sup>171</sup>

Contextualisation is another hermeneutical rule that is forcefully endorsed by Zhu Xi. When being puzzled by elusive expression, he always resorts to a contextual approach, and takes it as the only way to tackle the diversity of meaning and to enhance the comprehension of a phrase in terms of accuracy.<sup>172</sup> Furthermore, given the various ways in which a word is used and interpreted, the reader is left no choice but to refer to the context in order to make sense of the seemingly paradoxical interpretations; only after that is done will the previous contradiction give way to compatibility.<sup>173</sup> In both cases, the context rather than a single word is to be privileged.

His rearrangement of the text of *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning* draws heavily on the principle of contextualisation. In fact, the three crucial alterations that he makes on the basis of Cheng Yi and Zheng Xuan's editions are all claimed as a result of a further exploration of the context.<sup>174</sup> Whether such a proclamation is sufficiently convincing is another question. But certainly it is clear that from Zhu Xi's point of view the validity of the editing of this text is totally dependent on how well it fits the context, be it his edition or that of the previous masters. The rule of contextualisation should be universally applied to the evaluation of the editing or interpreting of a text.

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<sup>170</sup> Zhu Xi, ZZYL, Juan 11: '隨文解義。方子錄' ZZQS, 14,351.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.* Juan 11: '聖賢說出來底言語，自有語脈，安頓得各有所在，豈似後人胡亂說了也！須玩索其旨，所以學不可以不講。講學固要大綱正，然其間子細處，亦不可以不講。只緣當初講得子細，既不得聖賢之意，後來胡亂執得一說，便以為是，只胡亂解將去！必大錄此下云：“古人似未嘗理會文義。今觀其說出底言語，不曾有一字用不當者。” ZZQS, 14,352.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.* Juan 11: '凡讀書問：一般字，卻有淺深輕重，如何看？曰：當看上下文。節錄讀書，須從文義上尋，次則看註解。今人卻於文義外尋索。蓋卿錄' ZZQS, 14,351.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.* Juan 11: '凡讀書，須看上下文意是如何，不可泥著一字。如揚子：“於仁也柔，於義也剛。”到易中，又將剛來配仁，柔來配義。如論語：“學不厭，智也；教不倦，仁也。”到中庸又謂：“成己，仁也；成物，智也。”此等須是各隨本文意看，便自不相礙。淳錄' ZZQS, 14,350-1.

<sup>174</sup> Zhu Xi, DXHW No. 39: '或問、聽訟一章、鄭本元在止於信之後、正心脩身之前。程子又進而實之經文之下、此謂知之至也之上。子不之從、而實之於此、何也。曰、以傳之結語考之、則其為釋本末之義可知矣。以經之本文乘之、則其當屬於此可見矣。二家之說有未安者。故不得而從也。' ZZQS, 6,521.

*Ibid.* No. 43: '曰、此謂知之至也、鄭本元隨此謂知本繫於經文之後、而下屬誠意之前。程子則去其上句之複、而附此句於聽訟知本之章、以屬明德之上。是必皆有說矣。子獨何據以知其皆不盡然、而有所取舍於其間耶。曰、此無以他求為也。考之經文、初無再論知本知至之云者、則知屬之經後者之不然矣。觀於聽訟之章既以知本結之、而其中間又無知至之說、則知再結聽訟者之不然矣。且其下文所屬明德之章、自當為傳文之首。又安得以此而先之乎。故愚於此皆有所不能無疑者。獨程子上句之所刪、鄭氏下文之所屬、則以經傳之次求之而有合焉、是以不得而異也。' ZZQS, 6,523.

*Ibid.* No. 44: '曰、然則子何以知其為釋知至之結語、而又知其上之當有關文也。曰、以文義與下文推之、而知其釋知至也。以句法推之、而知其為結語也。以傳之例推之、而知其有關文也。' ZZQS, 6,523.

In addition, Zhu Xi urges the commentators to make sense of the logic and structure of a scriptural text which is not always explicit. He maintains that although the ancients do not seem to pay much attention to coherence of meaning, it is worth noting that sometimes underneath a seemingly fragmented text lies a coherent system of thought. He has the impression that the words of the sages preserved in a scripture are always formulated in a structure as well balanced as that of the ‘leaves on the same tree that respond to one another (*yeye xiangdang* 葉葉相當)’, and the layout of a scripture suggests a mutual union, like the ‘branches of a tree spontaneously gazing at one another (*zhizhi xiangdui* 枝枝相對)’.<sup>175</sup> He is deeply amazed and captivated by the perfect arrangement presented in the scriptures passed down by the sages.

Zhu Xi holds on to the assumption that every single word uttered by a sage will fall into place, and a text of a scripture as a collection of the sacred words never fails to hold a coherent meaning, which subsists in a semantic skeleton of its own.<sup>176</sup> Thus he urges all to keep an eye on the framework hidden in a text.<sup>177</sup>

As an experienced commentator, Zhu Xi tells his pupils that it is sometimes necessary to break up the whole into fragments, in order to grasp the structure and the logic of a text. But it takes some skill to dismantle a text properly, for one must first find the gaps and joints inherent within a text and then operate on it in line with those inbuilt gaps and joints.<sup>178</sup> In so doing one will be able to probe into a text without doing too much injustice to its original meaning. On that account Zhu Xi relocates the quotations of the poems in *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning* so as to form a text with coherent meaning.<sup>179</sup>

<sup>175</sup> Zhu Xi, *ZZYL*, Juan 10: ‘聖人言語皆枝枝相對，葉葉相當，不知怎生排得恁地齊整。道夫錄’ *ZZQS*, 14, 325.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.* Juan 11: ‘聖賢說出來底言語，自有語脈，安頓得各有所在，豈似後人胡亂說了也！升卿錄’ *ZZQS*, 14, 352.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.* Juan 11: ‘讀書之法，有大本大原處，有大綱大目處，又有逐事上理會處，又其次則解釋文義。雉錄’ *ZZQS*, 14, 338.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.* Juan 11: ‘看文字，且依本句，不要添字。那裡元有縫罅，如合子相似。自家只去扶開，不是渾淪底物，硬去鑿；亦不可先立說，牽古人意來湊。’ *ZZQS*, 14, 340-1.

<sup>179</sup> Zhu Xi, *DXHW* No. 35: ‘曰、復引淇澳之詩、何也。曰、上言止於至善之理備矣。然其所以求之方、與其得之之驗、則未之及。故又引此詩以發明之也。夫如切如磋、言其所以講於學者已精、而益求其精也。如琢如磨、言其所以脩於身者已密、而益求其密也。’ *ZZQS*, 6, 520.

Question: It is followed by another quotation of the poetry Qi-Yu, why?

Answer: What is said in the preceding phrase has fully illustrated the meaning of ‘reposing in the ultimate good’. However it has not touched upon the question why it is by that means we will achieve the ultimate goal, nor does it mention the manifest signals by which one’s attainment of that state could be verified. For that reason this poetry is quoted to further expound it. The metaphor of ‘cutting and filing’ means to say that one endeavours to perfect one’s learning after having mastered it; and that of ‘chiselling and

Just as a discerning eye is needed to see the hidden structure of a scriptural text, so an original mind is needed to find the profound meaning of a scripture. To Zhu Xi original ideas arise from diligence in thinking, and have little to do with subjectivism. Therefore the calling for originality does not contradict the aforementioned stress on objectivity. On the contrary, originality is in proportion to objectivity. Hence, in Zhu Xi's system he urges all Confucian students to reinforce the effort to cultivate an objective and unbiased mind, and at the same time attaches importance to independent thinking.

When reading what is written by others, it is not appropriate to assent without thinking. Never believe it unless you really know it is right. It necessitates deep thinking and requires one to savour the words of a text, and that is the only way to achieve genuine understanding.<sup>180</sup>

Unlike the many Confucians of the day who are content with repeating the expert view, Zhu Xi urges the younger generation to step out of the comfort zone and think on their own. Based on a scholastic ground, Zhu Xi encourages the young generation towards the effort of questing for the element of truth in a given text, and directs them to perform intellectual activities surrounding a text, to question, doubt, discuss and comment on it. In addition, he attributes 'having nothing to present' to the deficiency of an immature mind that has not fully developed to 'the point of doubting and questioning'.<sup>181</sup> In making such a judgement, Zhu Xi is not only justifying the scholastic stance of doubting and questioning a text that he intends to promote within Confucian tradition; more importantly he is turning that kind of mental wrestling with a text into an integral part of scriptural learning which should be experienced by all

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polishing' intends to show that one attempts to enhance one's personal quality despite having been through an elaborate procedure of self-cultivation.

<sup>180</sup> Zhu Xi, *ZZYL*, *Juan* 11: '看人文字，不可隨聲遷就。我見得是處，方可信。須沉潛玩繹，方有見處。不然，人說沙可做飯，我也說沙可做飯，如何可吃！謙錄' *ZZQS*, 14,342.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.* *Juan* 11: '读书理会道理，只是将勤苦捱将去，不解得不成。文王犹勤，而况寡德乎！今世上有一般议论，成就後生懒惰。如云不敢轻议前辈，不敢妄立论之类，皆中怠惰者之意。前辈固不敢妄议，然论其行事之是非，何害？固不可凿空立论，然读书有疑，有所见，自不容不立论。其不立论者，只是读书不到疑处耳。将精义诸家说相比并，求其是，便自有合辨处。璘錄' *ZZQS*, 14,348.

Zhu Xi gives more detailed instruction as to the key words hidden in footnotes on the basis of his own experience: 'Never skip the key words in reading the notes and commentaries. For some parts of it are arranged in a sloppy manner and indicate what is of least importance, there is also a portion that is torn between the insignificant and the urgent, and another portion implies the matter of crucial importance. I always pick my words carefully, and dare not write down a word unless it is thoroughly weighed.' See Zhu Xi, *ZZYL*, *Juan* 11: '看注解时，不可遗了紧要字。盖解中有极散缓者，有缓急之间者，有极紧要者。某下一字时，直是称轻等重，方敢写出！方子錄' *ZZQS*, 14,350.



Confucian learners. Thus he makes intellectual rigour an essential requirement, derived from the standard of the great learning.

In relation to the distinction he has made between the style of a scripture and that of a commentary, Zhu Xi points out the contrast between a general proposition and a detailed exposition, which drives him to stress the necessity for elaboration and analysis when commenting or interpreting a scripture. From his perspective, these two types of expression serve totally different purposes. Unlike a general proposition, which is expressed in an imperative tone and usually gives some precepts of moral significance, an exposition aims to spell out in detail the literal meaning of a precept, the scriptural ground upon which it is based, and the reasons for abiding by it.

In his *Daxue Zhangju* 大學章句 *Commentary on The Great Learning*, Zhu Xi occasionally gives his own interpretation, which seems to divert the reader's attention from the meaning of the original text and towards the commentator's speculation about it. A good example of this would be his interpretation of the five morals alluding to *Wen Wang* 文王 the King Wen, Zhu Xi makes it clear that the task of the Confucian scholars of the day is not to imitate the style of the scriptural text, but to quest for reasons, to elaborate upon what has been laid down by the ancient sages, and to contextualise it and root it into the longer scholarly tradition.<sup>182</sup>

From this academic standard arises the need to interpret the poems quoted in the scripture, and not simply provide an explanation of the literal meaning, so that some deeper implications pertaining to a quotation will be revealed. Overall Zhu Xi's commentary on the four cardinal Confucian scriptures formally ushers in a new phase of hermeneutics in the history of Confucian tradition, which is to proceed from a literal comprehension to a philosophical interpretation. Likewise Zhu Xi stresses the necessity of adopting the analytical argument in interpreting scriptures, which as a result pushes the level of accuracy and clarity one step further in Zhu Xi's writing of commentary, and also makes his editing of scripture more logically accountable.

Finally, Zhu Xi touches on those elements in a scripture that make no sense to the reader. He makes the straightforward suggestion: 'When encountering a part of a

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<sup>182</sup> Zhu Xi, *DXHW*, No.34: '曰、五者之目、詞約而義該矣。子之說乃復有所謂究其精微之蘊、而推類以通之者。何其言之衍而不切耶。曰、舉其德之要而總名之、則一言足矣。論其所以爲是一言者、則其始終本末豈一言之所能盡哉。得其名而不得其所以名、則仁或流於姑息、敬或墮於阿諛、孝或陷父、而慈或敗子。且其爲信亦未必不爲尾生白公之爲也。又況傳之所陳、姑以見物各有止之凡例。其於大倫之目猶且闕其二焉。苟不推類以通之、則亦何以盡天下之理哉。' *ZZQS*, 6,520.

scriptural text that does not make sense to you, just leave it as it is. If you insist on imposing an interpretation on it, you are bound to incur falsity.<sup>183</sup> Zhu Xi gives a very clear message: never attempt to make sense of a passage that is not understood; groundless assumptions out of personal caprice should be avoided in all circumstances.

Nevertheless, Zhu Xi makes allowance for some unavoidable speculation, so long as this is based on logical reasoning and does not contradict the basic doctrines preserved in the Confucian classics. When challenged as to his view on the authorship of *Daxue* 大學 *The Great Learning*, Zhu Xi turns to his impression of the distinctive style of a master, here we read:

The language of the scriptural text is concise yet contains complete truth; it concerns things at hand yet refers to what is deeper and far away, which cannot be achieved by one who is not a sage.<sup>184</sup>

Clearly, Zhu Xi cannot put his finger on precisely where solid scriptural evidence is to be found to back up his judgement, as a philological proof is nearly impossible in this case.<sup>185</sup> Therefore he resorts to the mode of expression, which, he believes, is very much indicative of the author's level of consciousness. To him, the distinctive style of a master is the manifestation of the inner holiness that master has achieved, therefore it cannot be mechanically imitated by one who is yet to attain the same level of consciousness. This speculation is of course open to question in terms of its historical accountability. That, however, is not Zhu Xi's main concern. What is more urgent to him is to see the relevance of one scripture to another, in the hope of grasping the profound meaning contained in the sublime words of the sages.

### 1.2.3 Unconventional Ideas of Zhu Xi: Focus on the Privilege of Knowing

Through *Sishu Zhangju Jizhu* 四書章句集註 *Commentary on the Four Books* Zhu Xi makes himself the best exemplar of the hermeneutical rules he has set up for all Confucians. In his work is seen an intriguing combination of the typical Confucian conservative stance with an exceptionally original mind. There seems not to be a tension between his affiliating himself with the entire Confucian tradition and at the

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<sup>183</sup> Zhu Xi, ZZYL, Juan 11: '經書有不可解處，只得闕。若一向去解，便有不通而謬處。蓋卿錄' ZZQS, 14,351.

<sup>184</sup> Zhu Xi, DXHW No. 16: '曰、正經辭約而理備、言近而指遠。非聖人不能及也。' ZZQS, 6,514.

<sup>185</sup> As Chen Lai points out, Zhu Xi's view as to the authorship of the scriptural portion and commentary portion of *The Great Learning* is simply speculation. See Chen Lai 陈来, *Zhuzi Zhexue Yanjiu* 朱子哲学研究 *A Study of Zhu Xi's Philosophy* (2008), 279.

same time fulfilling his intellectual excellence. On the contrary, these two are conceived as interdependent in all circumstances.

As an original thinker standing within the tradition of Confucianism, Zhu Xi is surely aware of the difference between his overall view of Confucian scriptures, which is woven into the fabric of his commentary, and the standpoint of the previous masters as revealed in their commentaries. Whenever there is a need to propose an unconventional idea, Zhu Xi first turns to a transmitted text for scriptural proof; if that is not possible he refers to the similar stance of a preceding master; finally he spells it out logically in an elegant and humble tone.<sup>186</sup> His writing of *Bu Zhuan* 補傳 *Supplement* is most illustrative of this characteristic. It seems to be less important a task to demonstrate one's originality than to express one's affinity with the whole scholarly tradition, which is normally achieved by illustrating a subtle continuity in thinking between a master and disciple. In Zhu Xi's case, Cheng Yi is undoubtedly the chief intellectual predecessor from whom Zhu Xi finds the origin of his thought. In line with Cheng Yi, Zhu Xi maintains the standpoint that the ultimate goal of the Confucian way of learning can only be achieved through a step-by-step process that commences from the practice of *gewu* 格物 the investigation of things. Most of his unconventional ideas are tied up with his further development of Cheng Yi's doctrine of *gewu* 格物 the investigation of things, which are expounded in three major themes: the relation of *zhi* 知 knowledge to *xing* 行 action; the correlation between *zhi* 知 intellect and *yi* 意 will; and in what sense *zhi* 知 knowing is relevant to *cheng sheng* 成聖 sage-becoming.

### 1.2.3.1 Knowledge versus Action

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<sup>186</sup> Zhu Xi, *DXHW* No. 45: '今也尋其義理既無可疑、考其字義亦皆有據。至以他書論之、則文言所謂學聚問辨、中庸所謂明善擇善、孟子所謂知性知天、又皆在乎固守力行之先、而可以驗夫大學始教之功爲有在乎此也。愚嘗反覆考之而有以信其必然。是以竊取其意以補傳文之闕。不然、則又安敢犯不韙之罪、爲無證之言、以自託於聖經賢傳之閒乎。' *ZZQS*, 6,526.

Translation: Now I have little doubt in mind after checking the idea [spelled out at the end of this quote] and logic of it, and by examining the literal meaning of the words I see that it is well-grounded. As for its relevance to other books, we can list the sayings of 'learning, congregating, discussing, and debating' in the *Commentary on the Text of Qian Diagram* (in *The Book of Change*), the expression of 'knowing and choosing the good' in *The Doctrine of the Mean*, and that of 'knowing nature and the Heaven' in *The Book of Mencius*. All of these point to something that precedes the cultivation of holding fast [to oneness] and the effort of putting the knowledge into practice, which is also verified by the first instruction of the great learning whose focus lies in the same area. I once studied it time and again and now I believe it is certainly and necessarily so. Hence I adopt his [Cheng Yi's] view to supplement the omitted text of commentary. How dare I commit the offence of using his name, utter groundless words and proclaim myself to be standing between the sacred scripture and the worthy commentary otherwise?

The doctrine of *zhi-xing* 知行 knowledge versus action has long been a controversial issue in the Confucian tradition. The meaning of *zhi* 知 knowledge, in accordance with classical Confucianism, is most likely to be moral-oriented unless a Confucian master specifically defines it otherwise. Conventional expressions with regard to the relation of *zhi* 知 knowledge to *xing* 行 action are inclined to stress the importance of action in the sense that one's knowledge of the moral precepts cannot carry weight unless one puts that knowledge into practice. Zhu Xi's viewpoint concerning this question does, to a certain extent, conform to the conventional stance, as it is said in *Yu Lei* 語類 *Conversations* *juan* 9 that 'knowledge and action always require each other ... With respect to sequence, knowledge comes first, and with respect to importance, action is to be privileged.'<sup>187</sup>

It is the notion of 'sequence' that triggers an innovative understanding of *zhi* 知 knowledge and *xing* 行 action within Cheng-Zhu school. The Neo-Confucians or at least those who affiliated with *li xue* 理學 the school of Principle came to realise that an individual brought up in the Confucian social milieu should function not only as a moral agent, but more importantly as a rational agent whose moral behaviour ought to derive from his own personal comprehension of the Confucian moral principles. Cheng Yi points out that the depth of an individual's moral awareness or knowledge of the moral principles determines what stance he will take towards moral conduct and how much effort he will put into moral cultivation. For Cheng Yi *zhen zhi* 真知 genuine knowledge naturally results in *li xing* 力行 earnest action. One who possesses a genuine knowledge of *li* 理 the Principle will take delight in observing it, because in *li* 理 the Principle lies one's own nature.<sup>188</sup>

Thinking in the same vein, Zhu Xi spells out in more detail the fundamental importance of *zhi* 知 knowledge to *xing* 行 action. The priority of *zhi* 知 knowledge over

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<sup>187</sup> Zhu Xi, *ZZYL*, *Juan* 9: '知、行常相須，如目無足不行，足無目不見。論先後，知為先；論輕重，行為重。閔祖錄

論知之與行，曰：方其知之而行未及之，則知尚淺。既親歷其域，則知之益明，非前日之意味。公謹錄聖賢說知，便說行。大學說“如切如磋，道學也”；便說“如琢如磨，自修也”。中庸說“學、問、思、辨”，便說“篤行”。顏子說“博我以文，謂致知、格物”；“約我以禮”，謂“克己復禮”。泳錄

致知、力行，用功不可偏。偏過一邊，則一邊受病。如程子云：“涵養須用敬，進學則在致知”。分明自作兩腳說，但只要分先後輕重。論先後，當以致知為先；論輕重，當以力行為重。端蒙錄' *ZZQS*, 14,298-9.

<sup>188</sup> Cheng Yi: '學者固當勉強，然不致知，怎生行得？勉強行者，安能持久？除非燭理明，自然樂循理。性本善，循理而行是須理事，本亦不難，但為人不知，旋安排著，便道難也。知有多少般數，煞有深淺。向親見一人，曾為虎傷，因言及虎，神色便變。旁有數人，見他說虎，非不知虎這猛可畏，然不如他說了有畏懼之色，蓋真知虎者也。學者深知亦如此。' 'Henan Chengshi Yishu 河南程氏遺書 Posthumous Work of the Two Cheng Masters', *Juan* 18, *Er Cheng Ji* 二程集 *Works of the Two Chengs* (1981), 1,186.

*xing* 行 action is then formally weaved into the fabric of *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning* in the form of commentary by referring to the order of the eight steps, in the sense that the first two steps- *gewu zhizhi* 格物致知 the investigation of things and extension of knowledge - fall into the category of *zhi* 知 knowledge, and the rest into the category of *xing* 行 action. Thus the eight-step course presented in *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning* is further condensed to a process composed of two parts: *zhi* 知 knowledge and *xing* 行 action.<sup>189</sup>

In a way that is not easily to be noticed Zhu Xi redefines the meaning of this concept, and takes *chengyi* 誠意 the sincerity of the will as the beginning of *xing* 行 action.<sup>190</sup> In that sense, the notion of *xing* 行 in Zhu Xi goes beyond what we mean by action or moral deeds, but extends to the subtle and invisible efforts involved in one's moral and spiritual life, such as *chi jing* 持敬 holding on to conscientiousness, *chi shou* 持守 holding fast to the root or goodness, *han yang* 涵養 nourishing the self-nature. Likewise the meaning of *zhi* 知 is broadened and deepened with reference to *zhi zhi* 致知 the extension of knowledge, *qiong li* 窮理 probing the Principle, and *jin xue* 進學 to advance the learning.<sup>191</sup> Instantly we are reminded of the motto of Cheng-Zhu school - '*hanyang xu yongjing, jinxue zezai zhizhi* 涵養須用敬, 進學則在致知 the key to personal cultivation

<sup>189</sup> Zhu Xi, ZZYL, Juan 9: '只有兩件事: 理會, 踐行。節錄' ZZQS, 14,299.

*Ibid.* Juan 8: '若物格、知至, 則意自誠; 意誠, 則道理合做底事自然行將去, 自無下面許多病痛也。"擴然而大公, 物來而順應。" 力行錄' ZZQS, 14,296.

*Ibid.* Juan 8: '佛家一向撤去許多事, 只理會自身己; 其教雖不是, 其意思卻是要自理會。所以他那下常有人, 自家這下自無人。今世儒者, 能守經者, 理會講解而已; 看史傳者, 計較利害而已。那人直是要理會身己, 從自家身己做去。不理會自身己, 說甚別人長短! 明道曰: "不立己後, 雖向好事, 猶為化物。不得以天下萬物撓己, 己立後, 自能了當得天下萬物。" 只是從程先生後, 不再傳而已衰。所以某嘗說自家這下無人。佛家有三門: 曰教, 曰律, 曰禪。禪家不立文字, 只直截要 識心見性。律本法甚嚴, 毫髮有罪。如云不許飲水, 才飲水便有罪過。如今小院號為律院, 乃不律之尤者也! 教自有三項: 曰天台教, 曰慈恩教, 曰延壽教。延壽教南方無傳, 有些文字, 無能通者。其學近禪, 故禪家以此為得。天台教專理 會講解。慈恩教亦只是講解。吾儒家若見得道理透, 就自家身心上理會得本領, 便自兼得禪底; 講說辨討, 便自兼得教底; 動由規矩, 便自兼得律底。事事是自家合理會。顏淵問為邦。看他陋巷簞瓢如此, 又卻問為邦之事, 只是合當理會, 看得是合做底事。若理會得入頭, 意思一齊都轉; 若不理會得入頭, 少間百事皆差錯。若差了路頭底亦多端: 有才出門便錯了路底, 有行過三兩條路了方差底, 有略差了便轉底, 有一向差了煞遠, 終於不轉底。賀孫錄' ZZQS, 14,289-90.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.* Juan 15: '格物者, 知之始也; 誠意者, 行之始也。意誠則心正, 自此去, 一節易似一節。拱壽錄' ZZQS, 14,488.

*Ibid.* Juan 15: '格物、致知, 是求知其所止; 誠意、正心、修身、齊家、治國、平天下, 是求得其止。物格、知至, 是知所止; 意誠、心正、身修、家齊、國治、天下平, 是得其所止。大學中大抵虛字多。如所謂 "欲"、"其"、"而後", 皆虛字; "明明德、新民、止於至善", "致知、格物、誠意、正心、修身、齊家、治國、平天下", 是實字。今當就其緊要實處著工夫。如何是致知、格物以至於治國、平天下, 皆有節目, 須要一一窮究著實, 方是。道夫錄' ZZQS, 14,493.

*Ibid.* Juan 15: '說大學次序, 曰: 致知、格物, 是窮此理; 誠意、正心、修身, 是體此理; 齊家、治國、平天下, 只是推此理。要做三節看。雉錄' ZZQS, 14,496.

<sup>191</sup> Chen Lai lists over ten pairs of notions concerning *zhi* 知 knowledge and *xing* 行 action that prevail in the Neo-Confucian context. See Chen Lai 陈来, *Zhuzi Zhexue Yanjiu* 朱子哲学研究 *A Study of Zhu Xi's Philosophy* (2008), 316.

lies in holding fast to earnestness or conscientiousness whereas the key to the advancement of learning lies in extending knowledge.<sup>192</sup> These two seemingly parallel lines give an example of what Zhu Xi means by *zhixing xiangxu* 知行相須 knowledge and action require each other,<sup>193</sup> in a context where *xing* 行 refers to issues concerning *han yang* 涵養 nourishing the self-nature, *zhi* 知 does not necessarily hold priority,<sup>194</sup> as *jing* 敬 conscientiousness should be practised at all time.<sup>195</sup>

Another interpretation of *zhi-xing* 知行 is to take *zhi* 知 as ‘knowing’ and *xing* 行 as ‘obtaining’, referring back to the eight steps presented in *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning*, the first two steps are intended to *zhi qi suo zhi* 知其所止 *know* the resting point, and the rest are meant to *de qi suo zhi* 得其所止 *obtain* the resting point.<sup>196</sup>

In comparison with Cheng Yi, Zhu Xi has a clear view as to the practical characteristic of the Confucian tradition, and is more aware of the danger in overstressing the privilege of knowing. Therefore, Zhu Xi conscientiously clarifies the boundary of intellectual operation so as to ensure that the intellectualist tendency represented by the doctrine of *gewu zhizhi* 格物致知 the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge will eventually merge into the practical way of Confucianism. When it comes to the debate with Buddhism and Daoism over the legitimacy of the contemplative path promoted by either of them, Zhu Xi falls back on the practical character of Confucianism in terms of fusing the achievement of *xiushen* 修身 self-cultivation into the practice of *qijia* 齊家 regulating one’s family and *zhiguo* 治國 governing the state. His criticism of the contemplative life cultivated by Buddhists and Daoists is mainly performed by referring to the steps that fall into the sphere of *xing* 行 action in accordance with his interpretation of the eight-step process of the great learning.

In spite of the fact that the importance of *xing* 行 action is to be emphasised when addressing those standing outside the circle of Confucianism, the message to Confucian

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<sup>192</sup> See Cheng Yi, ‘Henan Chengshi Yishu 河南程氏遺書 Posthumous Works of of the Two Cheng Masters’, *Juan 18, Er Cheng Ji* 二程集 *Works of the Two Chengs* (1981), 1,188.

<sup>193</sup> See Zhu Xi, *ZZYL, Juan 9, ZZQS*, 14,298-312.

<sup>194</sup> See Zhu Xi, *DXHW* No. 45, *ZZQS*, 6,524-6.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.* No. 4, *ZZQS*, 6,505-6.

<sup>196</sup> Zhu Xi, *ZZYL, Juan 15*: ‘格物、致知，是求知其所止；誠意、正心、修身、齊家、治國、平天下，是求得其止。物格、知至，是知所止；意誠、心正、身修、家齊、國治、天下平，是得其所止。大學中大抵虛字多。如所謂“欲”、“其”、“而後”，皆虛字；“明明德、新民、止於至善”，“致知、格物、誠意、正心、修身、齊家、治國、平天下”，是實字。今當就其緊要實處著工夫。如何是致知、格物以至於治國、平天下，皆有節目，須要一一窮究著實，方是。道夫錄’ *ZZQS*, 14,493.

adherents, in the view of both Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi, is that more attention should be paid to the role of knowing. Both maintain that a moral action should be charged with an individual's awareness of the moral principle that requires such conduct of him. Unless one is driven by a personal understanding of the moral principles, one will by no means act spontaneously in conformance with the moral precepts.

### **1.2.3.2 Intellect versus Will**

Before probing into Zhu Xi's analysis concerning the relation of intellect to will, we must first clarify the controversy that arises from the translation of *cheng yi* 誠意. James Legge translates it as 'make thoughts sincere',<sup>197</sup> and Daniel K Gardner as 'making the thoughts true' or 'thoughts become sincere',<sup>198</sup> whereas Wing Tsit Chan translates it as 'making wills sincere'.<sup>199</sup>

It is true that the meaning of *yi* 意 is twofold: will and thought. However, by referring to the context of *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning*, in particular the order of the eight steps, we have to conclude that Chan's translation of *yi* 意 as 'will' does more justice to the text. If it is conceived that the program of the first two steps – the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge – does not point exclusively to external things, but also entails an internal dimension, then the examination of the thoughts in the mind should be included in the investigation of things. If it also holds true that the fourth step – the rectification of the mind – deals mainly with the sentiments in the mind, then *cheng yi* 誠意 as the third step is more likely to be referring to the will rather than to thoughts. Thus the first four steps of the great learning correspond to the three functions of the mind: investigating of things and extending knowledge – knowing; making the will sincere – willing; and rectifying the mind – feeling.

Heavily drawing on the sequence of the eight steps as presented in *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning*, Zhu Xi starts to establish the primacy of knowing over willing in the Confucian way of personal cultivation, as we read:

In the Scripture it says: 'One who intends to keep his will sincere has to extend his knowledge in advance.' And it also says: 'The sincerity of the will is preceded by the extension of knowledge.' That means when the enlightening

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<sup>197</sup> For James Legge's translation of *The Great Learning*, see <http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/c/confucius/c748g/>

<sup>198</sup> Daniel K Gardner, *Chu Hsi and the Ta-hsueh: Neo-Confucian Reflection on the Confucian Canon* (1986), 36, 20.

<sup>199</sup> Wing-Tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (1969), 86.

brilliance consisting in the substance of the mind is yet to be thoroughly brought out, what issues from the mind will necessarily include the element of perfunctory self-deception due to a failure in applying this enlightening power to practice. However, if one has pursued this enlightening virtue yet is not rigorous enough in keeping the will sincere, then what he has achieved is not turned into his own property, thus cannot establish a foundation for the advancement in moral cultivation. Therefore, in order to see the core of this chapter one must refer to the previous chapter and investigate the two chapters together, only after that is done will one be able to see the beginning and the end involved in the process of exerting the effort into this practice, and to know that the sequence of it is irrevocable and none of the effort is to be skipped as it is thus stated.<sup>200</sup>

Here, in chapter six of *zhuan* 傳 the *Commentary*, Zhu Xi elaborates upon the third step, *cheng yi* 誠意 the sincerity of the will. What he particularly stresses here is not the meaning of it, but the correlation between the effort of making the will sincere and that of the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge. He affirms this stance by first referring to the scriptural text, and then addressing the dependence of *cheng yi* 誠意 the sincerity of the will on *zhi zhi* 致知 the extension of knowledge in practice. At the same time Zhu Xi makes it clear that self-enlightenment is not sufficient for moral cultivation, but must be followed by the cultivation of the will. Hence *zhi zhi* 致知 the extension of knowledge is a prerequisite to the cultivation of a good will; but that does not mean *zhi zhi* 致知 the extension of knowledge has an end in itself, its perfection lies rather in the following step- *cheng yi* 誠意 the sincerity of the will. Zhu Xi forcefully drives it home that moral cultivation is bound to result in ‘perfunctory self-deception’ if the effort in *zhi zhi* 致知 the extension of knowledge is neglected.

The priority of knowing to willing is further expounded in *Da Xue Huowen* 大學或問 *Questions and Answers concerning The Great Learning*, where Zhu Xi gives an elucidation, starting with an analysis of the tension between the ideal state of human nature in terms of its origin and the real picture of human existence in which a mixture of goodness and evil is present.

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<sup>200</sup> Zhu Xi, *DXZJ*: ‘经曰: “欲诚其意, 先致其知”。又曰: “知至而后意诚”。盖心体之明有所未尽, 则其所发必有不能实用其力, 而苟且自欺者。然或已明而不谨乎此, 则其所明又非己有, 而无以为进德之基。故此章之指, 必承上章而通考之, 然后有以见其用力之始终, 其序不可乱而功不可阙如此云。’ *Sishu Zhangju Jizhu* 四書章句集註 *Commentaries on the Four Books* (1983), 8.



A human being, once bearing the burden of the physical body, will be restricted by the dispositions he is endowed with. Thus man is surmounted by selfishness out of physical desire, and the natural state of the heavenly decree is blurred. In that case, his knowledge of the principles of things would surely be tainted with such an ambiguity that the place where the good or the evil exactly lies is hardly realised; or he would be stuck in a superficial understanding and unable to grasp the ultimate reason which tells why goodness is to be desired and evil to be loathed.<sup>201</sup>

Notwithstanding his Confucian faith in the goodness of human nature, Zhu Xi clearly takes into account the inborn limitation of man's knowledge and moral capacity due to *qi bing* 氣稟 the physio-psychical constitution with which man is endowed. In this respect Zhu Xi does not concern himself with an assertion of the original or ideal state of human nature, but rather turns to the simple fact that man is born with a physical body, which gives rise to the imperfections and ignorance that characterise his understanding of the world and himself, and thereby arises the necessity to probe the principles of things and to quest for the reasons for moral cultivation. Zhu Xi makes it clear that without first knowing where goodness lies and working out why goodness ought to be desired, one stands no chance of cultivating an inner tendency towards what is genuinely good. Therefore, a pure and wholehearted love for goodness is always based on the realisation that possesses the power to convince the whole person-body, mind and spirit, to look for nothing but goodness. That realisation, Zhu Xi believes, cannot be achieved without conducting intellectual inquiry into the reasons for moral cultivation.

Even if we accept that the core of the Confucian moral cultivation consists in the cultivation of the will, it still holds true that the effort in keeping the will sincere is conditioned by the apprehension of the reasons for so doing. Otherwise, it will lead to a consequence that is much more detrimental than it appears to be. Zhu Xi thus takes deficiency in knowledge as the source of self-deception in moral practice. This point is fully expounded in *Da Xue Huowen* 大學或問 *Questions and Answers concerning The Great Learning* (No.51) where Zhu Xi argues that 'without knowing that goodness is

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<sup>201</sup> Zhu Xi, *DXHW* No. 51: '然既有是形體之累、而又爲氣稟之拘。是以物欲之私得以蔽之、而天命之本然者不得而著。其於事物之理、固有瞢然不知其善惡之所在者、亦有僅識其粗、而不能真知其可好可惡之極者。' *ZZQS*, 6,532.

truly loveable, one's love for goodness will by no means be free from being entangled with his dislike for it, which means one is internally refusing goodness, despite his claiming of the love for it.'<sup>202</sup> The same point is put more bluntly in another pair of Q&A (No.34):

Knowing the name of a concept without grasping the reasons for that name, it will incur unfavourable consequences, namely 'humanity' will be degraded into over-tolerance, 'respectfulness' will turn into flattering, 'filial piety' may ruin the father, and 'kindness' might spoil the son.<sup>203</sup>

Over the history of Confucianism, Zhu Xi is probably the first one who has formulated so clearly a critical reflection on Confucian morality without abandoning the moral basis altogether. His apologetic stance does not seem to play a huge part in his theoretical questioning and analysis of the dogmas or creeds that have long been rooted in Confucian tradition. Instead of refuting or uprooting these widely accepted morals, Zhu Xi points out in a sharp tone that the observation of a moral precept, if not accompanied by a proper understanding of it, will give rise to all kinds of hypocrisy, stupidity and stubbornness. Zhu Xi, therefore, confirms that the third step, *cheng yi* 誠意 the sincerity of the will, cannot be performed separately as if it could stand on its own; on the contrary, it must be treated as a continuation of the first two steps: *gewu zhizhi* 格物致知 the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge.

In his *Da Xue Zhangju* 大學章句 *Commentary on The Great Learning* and the following elaboration in *Da Xue Huowen* 大學或問 *Questions and Answers concerning The Great Learning*, Zhu Xi's arguments concerning the primacy of knowing over willing are based mainly on the detrimental consequences caused by one's lack of effort in *gewu zhizhi* 格物致知 the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge. A philosophical speculation on this topic is seen in *Yu Lei* 語類 *Conversations* where Zhu Xi claims 'the role of *zhi* 知 intellect consists in the ability to discern and understand, while the role of *yi* 意 will is to bring knowledge into action. So *zhi* 知 intellect is more

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<sup>202</sup> Zhu Xi, *DXHW* No. 51: '其本心莫不好善而惡惡。夫不知善之真可好、則其好善也、雖曰好之、而未能無不好者以拒之於內、不知惡之真可惡、則其惡惡也、雖曰惡之、而未能無不惡者以挽之於中。是以不免於苟焉以自欺、而意之所發有不誠者。夫好善而不誠、則非唯不足以爲善、而反有以賊乎其善、惡惡而不誠、則非唯不足以去惡、而適所以長乎其惡。是則其爲害也、徒有甚焉、而何益之有哉。' *ZZQS*, 6,532-3.

For a detailed exposition of *cheng yi* 誠意 the sincerity of the will and *zi qi* 自欺 self-deception, as well as the relation between the two, see *ZZYL*, *Juan* 16, *ZZQS*, 14,514-32.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.* No. 34: '得其名而不得其所以名、則仁或流於姑息、敬或墮於阿諛、孝或陷父、而慈或敗子。' *ZZQS*, 6,520.

relevant to *xing* 性 nature and closer to *ti* 體 substance and *yi* 意 will bears more resemblance to *qing* 情 sentiment and is closer to *yong* 用 function'.<sup>204</sup> He takes *xin* 心 mind as the breeding ground for both *xing* 性 nature and *qing* 情 sentiment. The former represents *li* 理 Principle that is manifested in every human being, and the latter corresponds to *qi* 氣 the cosmic matter that each individual receives when his physical body comes into existence. The former reflects pure goodness, whereas the latter could be both good and evil. Zhu Xi applies the concepts of *ti* 體 substance and *yong* 用 function to the notions of *xing* 性 nature and *qing* 情 sentiment, and affiliates *zhi* 知 intellect with *xing* 性 nature and *ti* 體 substance, whereas *yi* 意 will with *qing* 情 sentiment and *yong* 用 function. In Zhu Xi *zhi* 知 intellect is not being identified with *li* 理 Principle and *xing* 性 nature, as it is still not free of *qi* 氣 the cosmic matter. However in comparison with *yi* 意 will, *zhi* 知 intellect is closer to *li* 理 Principle and *xing* 性 nature, and less dependent on *qi* 氣 the cosmic matter. Philosophically speaking, that is probably the reason why Zhu Xi allows *zhi* 知 intellect to have power over *yi* 意 will, and insists that *chengyi* 誠意 the sincerity of the will must be preceded by *zhizhi* 致知 the extension of knowledge.<sup>205</sup>

The relative significance of *zhi* 知 intellect and *yi* 意 will is also metaphorically expressed in *Yu Lei* 語類 *Conversations*. Zhu Xi depicts *gewu* 格物 the investigation of things as the turning point which determines whether one is sleep or awake, whereas *chengyi* 誠意 the sincerity of the will resembles the transitional point between good and evil.<sup>206</sup> It follows that one who attempts to cultivate a good will without the effort in *gewu zhizhi* 格物致知 the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge is no better than performing good in sleep.

The vital importance of *yi* 意 will is to be revealed by the unique status of the third step *chengyi* 誠意 the sincerity of the will in the process of the great learning. In conversing with his pupils, Zhu Xi explains that *chengyi* 誠意 the sincerity of the will indicates the critical point where the sagely consciousness starts to diverge from an

<sup>204</sup> Zhu Xi, *ZZYL*, *Juan* 15: '致知、誠意、正心，知與意皆從心出來。知則主於別識，意則主於營為。知近性，近體；意近情，近用。端蒙錄' *ZZQS*, 14,489.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.* *Juan* 15: '致知所以先於誠意者如何？曰：致知者，須是知得盡，尤要親切。尋常只將“知至”之“至”作“盡”字說，近來看得合作“切至”之“至”。知之者切，然後貫通得誠意底意思，如程先生所謂真知者是也。謨錄' *ZZQS*, 14,481.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.* *Juan* 15: '格物是夢覺關。格得來是覺，格不得只是夢。誠意是善惡關。誠得來是善，誠不得只是惡。過得此二關，上面工夫卻一節易如一節了。到得平天下處，尚有些工夫。只為天下關，須著如此點檢。又曰：誠意是轉關處。又曰：誠意是人鬼關！誠得來是人，誠不得是鬼。夔孫錄' *ZZQS*, 14,480-1.

uncultivated mind. One who has made a breakthrough in cultivating his volitional capacity will surely walk on the path of a gentleman, whereas one who fails in this respect may remain in the realm of the unworthy.<sup>207</sup> He particularly points out that it is relatively more difficult to proceed from *zhizhi* 致知 the extension of knowledge to *chengyi* 誠意 the sincerity of the will,<sup>208</sup> which, he believes, represents a leap in the process of the great learning. He takes *chengyi* 誠意 the sincerity of the will as the crucial step that holds the key to the transformation of knowledge into action.

The problem is how to make that transformation take place in the intellectual, moral and spiritual progress of each individual Confucian practitioner. Zhu Xi's solution is basically in line with that of Cheng Yi, which is to incorporate the step of *chengyi* 誠意 the sincerity of the will into that of *zhizhi* 致知 the extension of knowledge, on the basis of the pervasive power of *zhi* 知 intellect over *yi* 意 will as mentioned above.

From the Cheng-Zhu perspective, *zhenzhi* 真知 genuine knowledge entails a penetrating personal experience which always leads to a kind of self-transformation in terms of triggering a radical change in one's mode of willing and feeling. In that sense knowledge naturally possesses the power to penetrate the whole being of the person, and knowing plays a leading and predominant role over willing and feeling. However, one should bear in mind that it takes a life-long struggle to acquire that kind of genuine knowledge. The transformation cannot be achieved through immediate enlightenment alone; it is a natural result of a long, gradual accumulation of the effort in probing the principles of things external and internal. In that sense it is justified to say that one who sets about extending his knowledge will make progress in cultivating his will in the long run. Despite being aware of the difference between the second step *zhizhi* 致知 the extension of knowledge and the third step *chengyi* 誠意 the sincerity of the will, as well as the difficulty of leaping from one to the other, both Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi believe that the gap between them can automatically be bridged if one goes deep enough in *zhizhi* 致知 the extension of knowledge.<sup>209</sup>

Since *zhizhi* 致知 the extension of knowledge cannot be separated from *gewu* 格物 the investigation of things, and *gewu* 格物 the investigation of things is to be understood in terms of *qiong li* 窮理 probing the Principle within Cheng-Zhu school, it follows that

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid. Juan 15*: '大學所謂'知至、意誠'者，必須知至，然後能誠其意也。今之學者只說操存，而不知講明義理，則此心憤憤，何事於操存也！某嘗謂誠意一節，正是聖凡分別關隘去處。若能誠意，則是透得此關；透此關後，滔滔然自在去為君子。不然，則崎嶇反側，不免為小人之歸也。謨錄' ZZQS, 14,481.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid. Juan 18*: '今却不用慮其他，只是個“知至而後意誠”，這一轉較難。道夫錄' ZZQS, 14,599.

<sup>209</sup> This theme runs through ZZYL, *Juan 15* and *Juan 18*, ZZQS, 14,461-500, 596-643 respectively.

the effort in *gewu zhizhi* 格物致知 will be able to generate within an individual the capacity to bend the tendency of will and emotions towards what *li* 理 Principle calls for. In that sense the person will be able to adjust what is going on in his mind, be it the flow of thoughts, the fluctuation of feeling or the tendency of the will, in accordance with the command of *li* 理 Principle. Viewing the eight steps in the light of the concept of *li* 理 Principle, Zhu Xi depicts the process of Confucian learning as comprising three stages: to investigate *li* 理 Principle to the utmost; to gain a personal experience of *li* 理 (Principle); and to extend *li* 理 Principle. On that account *gewu zhizhi* 格物致知 the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge is to be located in the domain of knowing *li* 理 Principle, and *chengyi* 誠意 the sincerity of the will in that of experiencing *li* 理 Principle.<sup>210</sup>

This way of interpretation makes the correlation between knowing and willing more transparent. It implies the knowledge of *li* 理 Principle spontaneously navigates will towards goodness. Likewise, action of any kind is always determined by the depth of relevant knowledge that an acting agent has acquired. Following that logic, any immoral conduct will necessarily be attributed to a cognitive failure, in the sense that one fails to know the reasons for observing morality. Once a person has acquired a genuine knowledge of the moral principles, his will and sentiment will naturally be led by *li* 理 Principle rather than by his personal desires, and this will never fail to yield good deeds.

By stressing the irrevocable order of the eight steps, Zhu Xi makes it clear that the effort of making the will sincere is posterior to the quest for the truth in term of *qiong li* 窮理 probing the Principle. The sequence of the eight steps also justifies the way in which the three functions of the human mind are to be prioritised: that is, knowing is prior to willing and feeling.

Such an order of priority established by Zhu Xi encountered severe challenge and criticism in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), in particular from Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472-1529) and Liu Zongzhou 劉宗周 (1578-1645).<sup>211</sup> Wang draws heavily on the doctrine *zhixing heyi* 知行合一 the unity of knowledge and action, but he still maintains

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<sup>210</sup> Zhu Xi, *ZZYL*, *Juan* 15: ‘說大學次序，曰：致知、格物，是窮此理；誠意、正心、修身，是體此理；齊家、治國、平天下，只是推此理。要做三節看。雉錄’ *ZZQS*, 14,496.

<sup>211</sup> It requires another monograph to explore the intellectual development from Zhu Xi to Wang Yangming and Liu Zongzhou; here, it suffices to address the question with which the three Confucian thinkers continuously wrestled.

the primary role of knowing, despite giving it a different interpretation. It is Liu Zongzhou 刘宗周 (1578-1645) who completely reverses the order of knowing and willing set up by Zhu Xi. Liu makes a distinction between *yi* 意 will and *nian* 念 volitional idea,<sup>212</sup> whereby *yi* 意 will serves as an ontological substance which persists through the fluctuation of the volitional ideas; hence arises the concept of *yigen* 意根 the root of will. In contrast to Zhu Xi, Liu Zongzhou establishes a system of thought in which will holds an absolute priority over intellect; as a result, knowing is allocated to a subordinate level and is regarded as being posterior to both willing and feeling.<sup>213</sup>

### 1.2.3.3 From Intelligence to Sageliness

Instead of stressing the power of will, Zhu Xi fixes his attention on the role of the human intellect, and allows man's intellective power the primacy over sentiment and will throughout the process of the Confucian way of personal cultivation. By bringing the concept of *li* 理 Principle into the program of *gewu* 格物 the investigation of things, he is actually embedding the program of *qiong li* 窮理 probing the Principle into the core of Confucian learning and self-cultivation; thus the depth of one's penetration of *li* 理 Principle is not merely an indication of one's intellectual brilliance, but more importantly is regarded as the main factor that contributes to an individual's realisation of his own *xing* 性 nature. To Zhu Xi, *guan tong* 貫通 a thorough comprehension of *li* 理 Principle stands for the achievement of sageliness, which is fully unfolded in his interpretation of '*cheng* 誠 sincerity', one cardinal concept of Zhou Dun-yi (周敦頤 1017-1073).

Zhu Xi believes master Zhou is expounding the same idea in his two major books, *Taiji Tushuo* 太極圖說 *An Explanation of the Diagram of the Great Ultimate* and *Tong Shu* 通書 *Penetrating the Book of Changes*, as the former focuses on the concept of *Taiji* 太極 the Great Ultimate and the latter on that of *cheng* 誠 sincerity. Hence Zhu Xi takes the two as interchangeable and uses one to interpret the other, claiming that: 'What it

<sup>212</sup> Tu Weiming translates *yi* 意 as intention and *nian* 念 as volitional idea; in line with Tang Junyi 唐君毅, he sums up Liu's thesis in terms of the primacy of willing over feeling and knowing. For the details, see Tu Wei-ming, *Subjectivity in Liu Tsung-chou's Philosophical Anthropology in Way, Learning and Politics* (1989), 93-116.

<sup>213</sup> T'ang Chun-I, 'Liu Tsung-chou's Doctrine of Moral Mind and Practice and His Critique of Wang Yang-ming', in Wm. Theodore de Bary (ed.), *The Unfolding of Neo-Confucianism* (New York, 1975), 305-31.

means by *cheng* 誠 sincerity is the so-called *Taiji* 太極 the Great Ultimate.<sup>214</sup> Since he takes *Taiji* 太極 the Great Ultimate as *li* 理 Principle in its full sense, Zhu Xi then interprets *cheng* 誠 sincerity in terms of *li* 理 Principle.

Sincerity refers to what is the most truthful and real, the proper Principle that Heaven endows and things receive. Human beings all have it, but only the sages are able to complete it, that is the only reason why they are entitled to sagehood.<sup>215</sup>

In so doing, he weaves the concept of *li* 理 (Principle) into the meaning of *sheng* 圣 (sageliness); thus the effort in probing *li* 理 (Principle) shows a clear relevance to the aspiration for sagehood.

The reason for becoming a sage is nothing but to complete this real Principle which is the so-called ‘Great Ultimate’.<sup>216</sup>

This means that if one has acquired a genuine knowledge of *li* 理 (Principle), he has achieved self-transformation, namely, from an ordinary, ignorant human into a sage.

The same idea is expressed in an outspoken manner in private conversations, when Zhu Xi addresses this issue with his intimate friends and pupils. ‘Things in the world are so ephemeral that none is worth bearing in mind. Only the way of probing the Principle and personal cultivation suggests the ultimate path [leading to sagehood].’<sup>217</sup> Zhu Xi then redefines ‘sage’ as one who manifests the Great Ultimate in the full sense, and is always the ideal embodiment of the four cardinal Confucian virtues: *zhong* 中 mean, *zheng* 正 correctness, *ren* 仁 humaneness and *yi* 義 righteousness. A sage, Zhu Xi believes, performs in an effortless, spontaneous way and never fails to respond to his surroundings in the most appropriate manner. However, for those who have not attained the realm of sagely consciousness, it is necessary to carry out personal cultivation. Through the effort of self-cultivation, a gentleman brings *ji* 吉 auspiciousness to his life;

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<sup>214</sup> Zhu Xi, *Tong Shu Zhu* 通書註 *Commentary on Penetrating the Book of Changes*: ‘誠即所謂太極也。’ *ZZQS*, 13,97.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.* ‘誠者，至實而無妄之謂，天所賦、物所受之正理也。人皆有之，而聖人之所以聖者無他焉，以其獨能全此而已。’

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.* ‘聖人之所以聖，不過全此實理而已，即所謂“太極”者也。’

<sup>217</sup> Zhu Xi, *ZZYL, Juan 8*: ‘看得道理熟後，只除了這道理是真實法外，見世間萬事，顛倒迷妄，耽嗜戀著，無一不是戲劇，真不堪著眼也。又答人書云：“世間萬事，須臾變滅，皆不足置胸中，惟有窮理修身為究竟法耳。” 偶錄’ *ZZQS*, 14,296.

a mean person, on the other hand, goes against it and will incur *xiong* 凶 misfortune and disadvantage to his personal progress in all aspects.<sup>218</sup>

Thus, the nobility of a gentleman lies in his aspiration for self-perfection, while a mean person belittles himself due to his obliviousness to the sagely character and his neglect of his own moral and spiritual growth. Hence a kind of accidental distinction arises between a gentleman and a mean person by virtue of the difference in personal choice. One makes himself a gentleman because he chooses the noble and moral way; and one becomes a mean person only because he chooses otherwise.

A gentleman in the Confucian social context usually refers to the class of *shi* 士 the scholar-officials. According to Zhou Dunyi, *shi* 士 the scholar-officials should follow the steps of the ancient worthies and sages as described in the Confucian classics. He gives a formula of the Confucian spiritual progress, proceeding from *shi* 士 an official-scholar to *xian* 賢 a worthy and finally to *sheng* 聖 a sage: ‘The sages emulate Heaven, the worthies emulate the sages, and the official-scholars emulate the worthies.’<sup>219</sup> Evidently, Zhou Dunyi depicts the Confucian learning as an enterprise that aims to create sagely characters in the present time. That is the vision shared by the Neo-Confucian masters in the Song Dynasty to which Zhu Xi is not an exception. Zhu Xi repeatedly affirms that sageliness can be achieved through learning. To the Song Confucian masters, the sages and worthies as the protagonists in the classics are not merely legendary figures whose lives are frozen in the specific historical contexts in which they lived. The significance of an ancient sage or worthy lies in the fact that he functions as a concrete, lively embodiment of *tiandi zhixing* 天地之性 the heavenly nature of mankind. In other words, a sage is a manifestation of the great virtues inherent in each individual person.

If a sage is believed to be one who has lived out the true nature of mankind or the great virtues of each of us, the question will be how to transform an ordinary human being into a sage. To this question Zhu Xi and Zhou Dun-yi give the same answer, namely, thinking.

*a) The dialectical relation between thinking and non-thinking*

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<sup>218</sup> Zhu Xi, ‘Taiji Tushuo Jie 太極圖說解 Exposition of An Explanation of the Diagram of the Great Ultimate’: ‘聖人太極之全體，一動一靜，無適而非中正仁義之極，蓋不假修為而自然也。未至此而修之，君子之所以吉也；不知此而悖之，小人之所以凶也。’ *ZZQS*, 13,75.

<sup>219</sup> Zhou Dunyi, *Tong Shu* 通書 *Penetrating the Book of Changes*: ‘圣希天，贤希圣，士希贤。’ See Zhu Xi, *Tong Shu Zhu* 通書註 *Commentary on Penetrating the Book of Changes*, *ZZQS*, 13,107.



In line with the words stated in *Hong Fan* 洪範 *The Great Norm*, ‘*si yue rui, rui zuo sheng* 思曰睿，睿作聖 thinking is supposed to be profound and pervade all things, and such thinking enables one to be a sage’, Zhou Dunyi elaborates upon the meaning of sageliness in terms of *si* 思 thinking and *wusi* 無思 non-thinking:

Having no thought is the foundation, and thinking in a pervading manner is its function. No sooner does a subtle incipient activation become active than the inner sincerity is activated. Such is the response of a sage. Bearing no thought of anything yet pervading all things with his thinking, that is what is meant to be a sage.<sup>220</sup>

Zhou ingeniously grasps the dialectical relation of *wusi* 無思 non-thinking to *si* 思 thinking, and applies it to his account of the inner consciousness and the outer response of a Confucian sage. To him the thinking of a sage possesses the power to penetrate all in a spontaneous manner, which is fundamentally a passive response to subtle changes of surroundings. In that sense, a sage is not burdened with a single thought of any particular thing; hence he is free of thought.

Nevertheless, in order to achieve the state of *wusi* 無思 non-thinking, Zhou says, one has to think. And *si* 思 thinking paves the way for sageliness:

Without thinking one cannot pervade the subtlety of things, and without profound thought it is impossible to pervade all. Thus the capability of pervading all derives from that of penetrating the subtlety of things, and the ability to penetrate the subtlety of things comes from thinking. Therefore thinking constitutes the ground for the effort of sage-making and also indicates the subtle, incipient activation of auspiciousness and ominousness.<sup>221</sup>

Having addressed the two sides of *si* 思 thinking and *wusi* 無思 non-thinking embodied by a sagely character, Zhou turns to the importance of *si* 思 thinking and takes it as the focal point of the effort of sage-making.

Zhu Xi makes this more obvious in his commentary on the line: ‘*si* 思 thinking to the utmost, one will become a sage and be omniscient.’<sup>222</sup> In *Conversations*, Zhu Xi continually ponders on this topic. He affirms that ‘*zhi* 知 intellect and *si* 思 thinking are

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<sup>220</sup> Zhou Dunyi, *Tong Shu* 通書 *Penetrating the Book of Changes*: ‘無思，本也；思通，用也。幾動於彼，誠動於此。無思而無不通，為聖人。’ ZZQS, 13,106.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.* ‘不思，則不能通微；不睿，則不能無不通。是則無不通，生於通微，通微，生於思。’

<sup>222</sup> Zhu Xi, *Tong Shu Zhu* 通書註 *Commentary on Penetrating the Book of Changes*: ‘思之至，可以作聖而無不通。’ ZZQS, 13,106.

of the most crucial importance, but the two are only one thing. Intellect is like hand, thinking is to do things with the hand, and thinking is to use the intellect.’<sup>223</sup>

b) From ‘*zhi zhi* 致知 the extension of knowledge’ to ‘*zhi zhi* 知至 knowing to the utmost’ Despite all the effort in defending Zhou’s thought, in particular his long and tedious debate with the Lu brothers over the legitimacy of Zhou Dunyi’s controversial concept of ‘*wuji* 無極 Non-Ultimate’, Zhu Xi is fully aware of the impact of the negative and passive tone of terms such as ‘Non-Ultimate’ and ‘non-thinking’, and somehow reverses it in his own system. His mode of expression prefers ‘*taiji* 太極 Supreme Ultimate’ to ‘*wuji* 無極 Non-Ultimate’, and ‘*si zhi zhi* 思之至 thinking to the utmost’ or ‘*si tong* 思通 penetrative and profound thought’ to ‘*wu si* 無思 non-thinking or having no thought’. The concept of ‘*si zhi zhi* 思之至 thinking to the utmost’ is still too abstract and of too contemplative a flavour, so that Zhu Xi finally chooses the term ‘*zhi zhi zhi* 知之至 or *zhi zhi* 知至 knowing to the utmost’ on the basis of his understanding of *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning*, and takes the state of ‘*zhi zhi* 知至 knowing to the utmost’ as the goal or end of the effort of ‘*zhi zhi* 致知 the extension of knowledge’.<sup>224</sup> From the practice of *zhi zhi* 致知 the extension of knowledge arises the necessity of *gewu* 格物 the investigating things.

Following that logic, it is understandable why in Zhu Xi’s system *gewu* 格物 the investigating things and *zhi zhi* 致知 the extension of knowledge serve as the basis of the Confucian personal cultivation and are affiliated with the effort of sage-making. Zhu Xi claims:

Each of us has knowledge; it cannot be true that we are all ignorant. The only problem is that we are not yet able to extend our knowledge and to investigate the principles of things to the utmost. And the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge are one thing.

<sup>223</sup> Zhu Xi, ZZYL, Juan 5: ‘問：知與思，於人身最緊要。曰：然。二者也只是一事。知與手相似，思是交這手去做事也，思所以用夫知也。卓錄’ ZZQS, 14,234.

<sup>224</sup> Zhu Xi particularly highlights the difference between ‘*zhi* 致 extending’ and ‘*zhi* 至 to the utmost’, see ZZYL, Juan 15: ‘問：“致知”之“致”，“知至”之“至”，有何分別？曰：上一“致”字，是推致，方為也。下一“至”字，是已至。先著“至”字，旁著“人”字，為“致”。是人從旁推至。節錄’ ZZQS, 14,478.

It is not the case that we are to investigate things today, and to extend knowledge tomorrow. The investigation of things is an expression from the aspect of the Principle, and the extension of knowledge from that of the mind.<sup>225</sup>

And:

To investigate things is to probe the ultimate principles of things; to extend knowledge means there is nothing that cannot be known by our mind. The investigation of things refers to the details; the extension of knowledge refers to the whole picture.<sup>226</sup>

It is notable that Zhu Xi addresses the power of knowing all inherent in the human mind, which, he believes, can be fully realised by means of probing the principles of things. By stressing the step of *gewu* 格物 the investigating things and that of *zhi zhi* 致知 the extension of knowledge as one and the same exclusive and irreplaceable means, Zhu Xi is actually placing the cultivation of the intellective power with researching everything to the minute detail at the core of the Confucian personal cultivation and self-realisation.

In that sense, it is justified to attribute to Zhu Xi's system of thought an intellectualistic tendency. However, Zhu Xi's emphasis on the role of intellect does not serve intellectual purposes alone, but aims to achieve something far beyond intellectual accomplishment. He makes it very clear that after the things have been investigated and knowledge extended, one can attain a level of consciousness or a state of mind such that one will acquire a 'thorough comprehension of all the multitude of things, external or internal, fine or coarse, and every exercise of the mind will be marked by complete illumination'.<sup>227</sup>

Zhu Xi assures his disciples that a long-term gradual accumulation of knowledge gives rise to a breakthrough that allows one to grasp the whole picture, in which all, be it the internal or the external, *xin* 心 mind or *li* 理 Principle, is fully revealed and fused into one. By using '*guan tong* 貫通 thorough comprehension' and '*wu bu ming* 無不明 complete illumination' to define the goal of Confucian learning, Zhu Xi is, in a sense,

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<sup>225</sup> Zhu Xi, ZZYL, Juan 15: '郭叔雲問：為學之初，在乎格物。物物有理，第恐氣稟昏愚，不能格至其理。曰：人個個有知，不成都無知，但不能推而致之耳。格物理至徹底處。又云：致知、格物，只是一事，非是今日格物，明日又致知。格物，以理言也；致知，以心言也。格錄' ZZQS, 14,473.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid. Juan 15: '曰：格物，是物物上窮其至理；致知，是吾心無所不知。格物，是零細說；致知，是全體說。時舉錄' ZZQS, 14,471.

<sup>227</sup> Zhu Xi, DXZJ: '則眾物之表裡精粗無不到，而吾心之全體大用無不明矣'，*Sishu Zhangju Jizhu* 四書章句集註 *Commentaries on the Four Books* (1983), 7.

substituting a rationalistic description of the goal of Confucian learning and self-cultivation for any type of expression phrased in mythological or supernatural terms. There is no promise of a celestial reality such as Heaven or Pure land, nor an aspiration for a joyful religious experience such as ecstasy or eternal peace. Moreover, he adheres to the same literary standard throughout his exegesis, thus making the whole piece of work seamless and consistent. The final stage of *gewu* 格物 the investigating things, according to Zhu Xi's conception of Confucian learning, falls into the same category, but to a different degree; what seems incomprehensible is in fact a natural result, or in philosophical terms a qualitative leap, which is to be finally brought about by long-term observation of the human intellect.

*c) Knowing as a path to sageliness*

It is clear that Zhu Xi pays a great deal of attention to his wording, and chooses his vocabulary with care, due to a deep concern about the edifying effect of his teaching. He deliberately avoids ambiguous terms and vague statements. As to the abstract philosophical categories he intends to employ in his work, Zhu Xi handles them with great caution. But he is not the only one who has to confront the problem of language. In fact, most of the Neo-Confucian masters in the Song-Ming Dynasty had experienced the struggle for a new vocabulary, different from the Buddhist and Daoist terminologies, and here Zhu Xi's work is no exception. He basically resorts to the book of *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning*, and as a result his wording assumes an intellectualistic colour. He falls back on terms such as '*zhi zhi* 知至 knowing to the utmost', '*guan tong* 貫通 thorough comprehension' and '*wu bu ming* 無不明 complete illumination' to express the culmination of the practice of *gewu* 格物 the investigating things. It goes without saying that to combine an adjective such as 'ultimate', 'utmost', 'thorough' or 'complete' with the noun 'knowledge' or 'comprehension' does not make much sense from an epistemological standpoint, because it is simply impossible for human cognition. To make sense of these terms, we must see beyond epistemology. Probably that is what Zhu Xi intends to do. When he deliberately combines 'ultimate' with 'knowledge', 'thorough' with 'comprehension', and 'complete' with 'illumination', he is talking about the unlimited potential or the ultimate goal of knowing, which consists precisely in our limited investigation of things.

Zhu Xi takes the initiative to reveal the sagely wisdom concealed in the scriptural text through a language of intellectual nature. That explains why he takes pains to

redefine the ultimate goal of *gewu zhizhi* 格物致知 the investigation of things and extension of knowledge, and stretch the power of knowing to extremes, so that the end of knowing is no longer the same as the beginning, hence a breakthrough is possible. In other words, the investigation of things is meant to go beyond the domain of intellectual enquiry. In contrast to the philological scholarship prevailing in the Qing Dynasty, Zhu Xi's rearrangement of and *Bu Zhuan* 補傳 *Supplement* to the text of *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning*, serve solely to formulate a systematic, philosophical interpretation of scripture, so as to transmit the message of the ancient sages in a more effective way. For that purpose, Zhu Xi attempts to rephrase the description of the sagely consciousness or sagely state of mind. What he does in this respect alone indicates a subtle yet groundbreaking change in the mode of thinking within Confucian tradition: the language employed in depicting a sagely character seems to be shifting from cosmological, mythological and ethical to intellectual and philosophical terminologies. A brief comparison between the diverse versions of the account of sageliness will shed some light on this point:

- 1) The sage as one who can read the mystical code of the universe, thus participates in formulating the human culture:

Heaven gives birth to spirit-like things; the sage took them as models. Heaven and Earth produce changes; the sage imitated them. In the heavens hang images that reveal good and evil fortunes; the sage converted them into symbols. The Yellow River gave forth the plan, and the Lo River gave forth the script; the sage noted their meanings.<sup>228</sup>

- 2) The sage as a co-creator whose greatness is equivalent to Heaven and Earth:

Being able to assist the transforming and nourishing powers of Heaven and Earth, a sage may rise to be the equal of Heaven and Earth.<sup>229</sup> (*Zhong Yong* 中庸 *The Doctrine of the Mean*)

- 3) The sage as one who has achieved an eternal harmony with the universe:

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<sup>228</sup> *Jici Zhuan* 繫辭傳 *The Great Treatise* section 11: ‘是故天生神物，聖人則之；天地變化，聖人效之；天垂象見吉凶，聖人像之；河出圖，洛出書，聖人則之。易有四象，所以示也；繫辭焉，所以告也；定之以吉凶，所以斷也。’

<sup>229</sup> *Zhong Yong* 中庸 *The Doctrine of the Mean* section 22: ‘則可以贊天地之化育。可以贊天地之化育，則可以與天地參矣。’

[A sage] in his moral qualities is in harmony with Heaven and Earth; in his brilliancy, with the sun and moon; in his orderly procedure, with the four seasons; and in his good and evil fortunes, with gods and demons.<sup>230</sup>

4) The sage as one who is marked by ultimate knowledge:

When one has exerted oneself for a long time, finally a morning will come when complete understanding will open before one. Thereupon there will be thorough comprehension of all the multitude of things, external or internal, fine or coarse, and every exercise of the mind will be marked by complete illumination. That is the state of mind after the things have been investigated and the knowledge extended.<sup>231</sup>

Although Zhu Xi does not make it explicit that one who has accomplished *gewu zhizhi* 格物致知 (the investigation of things and extension of knowledge) is entitled to sagehood, the all-knowing qualities of ‘*guan tong* 貫通’ (thorough comprehension) and ‘*wu bu ming* 無不明’ (complete illumination) can be attributed only to a sage. Bear in mind that Zhu Xi deliberately keeps a distance from the contemplative life advocated by Buddhism and Daoism, while also distinguishing himself from worldly-minded Confucians; moreover, he sternly opposes the idealistic approach promoted by *xin xue* 心學 (the school of mind). Having discarded all the above solutions, Zhu Xi chooses a seemingly rationalistic path; hence arises the need to create the language that is most suitable for the rationalistic character of his thought.

Thus emerges a new version of the sagely state of mind, an intellectualistic account of a sagely character, in Zhu Xi’s most important work: his *Bu Zhuan* 補傳 *Supplement* to the section of the investigation of things and extension of knowledge. In 134 words Zhu Xi manages to spell out the means and goal of the Confucian learning in intellectual terms, and consequently drives home the all-knowing attribute of the Confucian ideal personality. In Zhu Xi’s exegesis on the doctrine of the investigation of things, the desire for religious experience, the aspiration to spiritual bliss and the quest for celestial reality seem to have been translated into a step-by-step, rationalistic way of learning.

Thereby we reach the kernel of Zhu Xi’s thought: the approach to sageliness and the key to sageliness both consist in the immense power of knowing, because the whole

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<sup>230</sup> Qian Wenyan 乾文言 *An Explanation of the Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate*: ‘夫大人者，與天地合其德，與日月合其明，與四時合其序，與鬼神合其吉凶。先天而天弗違，後天而奉天時。’ English translation is from Wei Tat, *An exposition of the I-Ching or Book of Changes* (Hong Kong, 1977), 71-2.

<sup>231</sup> Zhu Xi, *Bu Zhuan* 補傳 *Supplement*, DXZJ, sect. on ‘the investigation of things’, *Sishu Zhangju Jizhu* 四書章句集註 *Commentaries on the Four Books* (1983), 7.

substance and the great function of the mind lie in the capacity for *qiong li* 窮理 probing the Principle. The unification of *xin* 心 mind and *li* 理 Principle occurs only when *li* 理 Principle is known to *xin* 心 mind. Otherwise it remains merely as an assumption. It is worth noting that in Zhu Xi's system the doctrine of the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge is based precisely on such an assumption: the unity of *xin* 心 mind and *li* 理 Principle, of external and internal. For that reason, the investigation of the principles of things entails two directions: on one hand it indicates man's approach to things; and on the other the things are drawn to man. Once man starts to cast the light of intellect upon a thing, the principle inherent in it will be revealed, which in turn brings the dormant intellectual power into effect. Thus *li* 理 Principle is to be revealed through the exercise of the human intellect, and the intellectual power of *xin* 心 mind is to be unfolded through its comprehension of *li* 理 Principle.

Following Zhu Xi's understanding of the human intellect, it is a correlation rather than a tension that exists between the acquisition of knowledge and the cultivation of moral virtues. Likewise there is no substantial problem in transforming knowledge into wisdom, because the operation of the intellectual power encompasses all these dimensions. Once a person aspires to a thorough understanding of all and embarks upon probing the principles of things at hand, he allows himself to be open to the whole universe, and at the same time the whole universe opens up to him. Such is the beauty of knowing that it leads a person to proceed from manhood to sagehood. To Zhu Xi, if it is possible for a man to be transformed into a sage through the Confucian way of personal cultivation, it can only be achieved through the exercise of the intellectual power in its full sense, when things have been thoroughly investigated and knowledge fully extended. Thus sageliness should never be separated from the ground of human effort, and must be deemed the end in contrast to the means, the final result in contrast to a long process of gradual accumulation of knowledge. That is the core of Zhu Xi's message.

### **1.3 Zhu Xi the Philosopher: Promoting Intellectualism within Confucian Tradition**

After the completion of *Da Xue Zhangju* 大學章句 *Commentary on The Great Learning*, Zhu Xi went on to compose *Da Xue Huowen* 大學或問 *Questions and Answers concerning The Great Learning*, which can be deemed a complement to the *Commentary*, and is intended to enhance the reception of it. Zhu Xi's main idea persists

throughout the two series of compositions, but the way in which it is unfolded differs between them.

Although the difference between the two works is obvious, the reason remains obscure until we look more closely at the context in which they emerge. A brief glance at the history of Confucianism reveals the crucial importance of commentary writing. The authority of scriptural commentary is almost beyond dispute, and the way to preserve the traditional values and concepts is always to promote an orthodox commentary on a massive scale. Even before the rise of Neo-Confucianism in the Song Dynasty, throughout the previous ages and particularly that of the Han Dynasty, commentary was considered the most authoritative type of work, produced by the greatest minds. By contrast, a philosophical essay entitled ‘On...’ carries far less weight, and consequently has little impact on the development of this tradition.

Put simply, the genre itself determines to what extent and in which manner the author is allowed to set forth his own idea. For instance, the writing of a commentary on scripture surely requires much more self-discipline than does a philosophical essay, since different academic criteria apply. The author of a commentary is expected to demonstrate his comprehension of the text rather than the depth and originality of his own thinking. For that reason the composition of commentary requires the writer to go through at least two steps: first to form a coherent understanding of the original text, and then to apply that understanding to the explanation of the text.

That is precisely what Zhu Xi does in his line-by-line *Da Xue Zhangju* 大學章句 *Commentary on The Great Learning*, in which his idea permeates, and is often implicitly expressed through his explanation of the text, which could cover the literal meaning of a word, the moral and spiritual implications, and the points made by previous commentators. Clearly, within the framework of the *Commentary* there is little room for a systematic articulation of his philosophy.

Therefore, the philosophical speculations are to be unfolded in a different format. This is done splendidly in *Daxue Huowen* 大學或問 *Q&A concerning The Great Learning*.<sup>232</sup> The insightful thoughts and the seemingly unconventional ideas, having

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<sup>232</sup> Chen Fengyuan 陳逢源 highlights the importance of Zhu Xi’s *Q&A*. Through a comparative study of the two, Chen points out the parallels and differences between Zhu Xi’s commentary and his *Q&A*. See his paper ‘Zhu Xi Zhu Sishu Zhi Zhuanzhe-yi Xue Yong Zhangju yu Huowen wei Bidui Fanchou 朱熹註四書之轉折-以〈學庸章句〉與〈或問〉為比對範疇 The Changes Zhu Xi had made in His Composing of Commentary on the Four Books’, *Dongwu Zhongwen Xuebao* 東吳中文學報 *Chinese Academic Journal of Dongwu* 15 (2008), 17-40.



been excluded from the *Commentary*, are now allowed to shine in *Q&A*. It is in *Daxue Huowen* 大學或問 *Q&A concerning The Great Learning* Zhu Xi's own idea is being set forth, with little interruption and restriction. In this book he allows his personal approach free rein, and formulates his point of view in a highly logical and systematic manner.

Put simply, *Commentary* and *Q&A* represent two different formats and fulfil different purposes. *Commentary* as a companion to scripture aims to theoretically reconstruct and enrich the Confucian tradition; thus it must be written in a style that is intelligible to all: to those inside and outside the Confucian tradition, to this generation and to generations to come. Zhu Xi is certainly aware of the nature of this task; he has spent over four decades on it. By contrast, Zhu Xi's *Q&A* was intended for a very small circle, composed mainly of his pupils and friends who were concerned with philosophical speculations. As Zhu Xi himself insisted, it was not meant to be circulated in a broader community. Although he remained deeply occupied with metaphysical questions throughout his life, he did not believe that everyone must philosophise. His personal disposition to philosophical thinking happened to be in tune with the academic climate of his time, hence his undertaking of the *Q&A*.

### 1.3.1 An Overall Description of *Q&A concerning The Great Learning*

The format of *Q&A* had appeared before the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-220 A.D.), but a systematic application of *Q&A* as a literary form was seen in the works of the Han scholars, typically in *Baihu Tongyi* 白虎通義 *Comprehensive Meaning as Discussed in the White Tiger Hall*.<sup>233</sup> The form of *Q&A* was also employed by the Song Confucian masters in answering questions of their students and in debating with each other over controversial issues of different kinds, as found in Zhu Xi's *Yu Lei* 語類 *Conversations* and *Wen Ji* 文集 *Literary Works*. Cheng Yi's *Yi Shu* 遺書 *Posthumous Work* is another good example of it.<sup>234</sup> But none of the aforementioned works seems to contain a series of questions that can be compared with what Zhu Xi listed in his *Daxue Huowen* 大學或問 *Q&A concerning The Great Learning*. The questions selected in this book are much more intellectually demanding, and the answers he gives reflect a higher level of

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<sup>233</sup> This book is derived from the debate over the Confucian classics, which was carried out among official scholars around 79 A.D. with the support of the emperor Xian in the Han dynasty. It stands as the orthodox doctrine of Confucianism and prevailed throughout the Han dynasty.

<sup>234</sup> In particular in *Juan 18* we see a focused presentation of the philosophical questioning that contains the very element of Cheng Yi's thought, which is adopted and further expounded by Zhu Xi.

complexity. It stands out among the massive intellectual output of Neo-Confucian masters in the Song, by virtue of the mode of thinking and expression demonstrated throughout; that is, thinking in philosophical and logical terms and giving systematic elucidation of that thinking.

#### **1.3.1.1 Account and Analysis of the Content**

This book consists of 86 pairs of Q&A, the contents of which fall into seven categories:

- 1) Explanation and interpretation – **65** pairs (No. 1-6, 9-17, 19-26, 28-32, 35-37, 40-41, 48, 53, 55-74, 76-85)
- 2) Editorial disputation – **9** pairs (No. 8, 18, 38-39, 42-45, 86)
- 3) Systematic elucidation – **4** pairs (No. 7, 46, 49, 51)
- 4) Response to criticism – **3** pairs (No. 34, 47, 50)
- 5) Semantic question – **3** pairs (No. 33, 52, 75)
- 6) Phonetic question – **1** pair (No. 54)
- 7) Philological question – **1** pair (No. 27)

The proportion of each category makes it clear that the issue of hermeneutics prevails in this book, Q&A as a whole is not about a variety of contested topics, but focuses on interpretation, editing and language. Here Zhu Xi spells out in detail why and how his treatment of the text of *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning* differs from the previous editions. Based on the number of pairs of Q&A in each of the above categories, we can easily work out the proportion of each type of question to the whole book, which gives a clear indication of what Zhu Xi intends in composing this volume after his *Da Xue Zhang ju* 大學章句 *Commentary on The Great Learning*.

With regard to category 1, Zhu Xi gives his own explanation and interpretation of the original text, in what can be seen as a continued expounding of the views already stated in the *Commentary*. In so doing his stance on tradition and scripture becomes transparent, and the depth of his own appropriation of the scriptural text is intensified. Among 86 pairs of Q&A, Zhu Xi allows 65 to be bound up with his specific understanding of this ancient text.

As shown above, Zhu Xi's approach to the text is demonstrated primarily through his re-editing of it, in which he pinpoints the defects in the previous editions and openly expresses his disagreement with the previous masters, both Zheng Xuan and Cheng Yi. This can be seen in the second category of Q&A, the 9 pairs on editorial disputations.

His original ideas and philosophical thinking are densely unfolded in categories 3 and 4; Q&A in the former category are intended to establish his thesis in a systematic

manner, and those in the latter form an intellectual response to the typical challenges from those people inclined to the idealistic stance promoted by the other major school of thought of the day within the Confucian tradition..

As this book is written chiefly for an inquisitive mind who may be puzzled by Zhu Xi's line-by-line commentary on *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning*, one who may hold serious doubts over the legitimacy of his interpretation and strong opposition to his overall approach, the literal meaning of the text is not greatly at issue here. Nevertheless, Zhu Xi makes some room for discussion over semantic and phonetic questions, as can be seen in categories 5 and 6.

The existence of the seventh category is an indication that philological questions are also touched upon in this book. Zhu Xi briefly rectifies an erroneous view over the authorship of *Kang Gao* 康誥 *The Announcement of Kang*, and ends by making it clear that although he has no intention to expound it here, it is nevertheless an important question that should be fully elaborated elsewhere for the reader.

#### **1.3.1.2 Implicit Structure of the Book**

The structure of this book does not exhibit any unique or outstanding feature, apart from the format of Q&A. In *Zhu Zi Quan Shu* 朱子全書 *The Complete Work of Zhu Xi*<sup>235</sup> the 86 pairs of Q&A are divided into two parts: Nos.1-41 constitute part one, and Nos.42-86 part two, a division based mainly on length rather than a close examination of content. It is probable that only the sequence of these questions and answers will give us some clue as to the implicit structure of the whole book. Clearly the 86 pairs of Q&A are by no means compiled at random, but organised in accordance with Zhu Xi's rearrangement of *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning*, proceeding from the portion of *Jing* 經 the *Scripture* to that of *Zhuan* 傳 the *Commentary*.

A basic structure hidden in Zhu Xi's *Daxue Huowen* 大學或問 *Q&A concerning The Great Learning* can then be discerned as follows:

Q&A as a general introduction – Nos.1-6;

Q&A on the portion of the *Scripture* – Nos.7-17;

Q&A on the portion of the *Commentary* – Nos.18-86.

Nos.1-6 function as a general introduction to the whole book. Zhu Xi commences with an explanation of the two kinds of seemingly contrasting learning: the so-called 'great learning' and 'elementary learning'. Then, in Nos.4-6, which represent the essence or

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<sup>235</sup> Zhu Xi, *ZZQS*, 6,504-47.

spirit of the Cheng-Zhu school in terms of their methodology, he incorporates the program of ‘elementary learning’ into that of the ‘great learning’ through the art of ‘*jing* 敬 conscientiousness’.<sup>236</sup> By ‘being conscientious’ Zhu Xi means being constantly alert and attentive, maintaining full concentration; this is in stark contrast to the concept of ‘*jing* 静 quiescence’ advocated by Zhou Dunyi, which refers to a desireless, undisturbed state of mind tainted with Daoist colour. Zhu Xi maintains that the practice of ‘being conscientious’ should persist throughout the whole process of learning and be universally applied to all learners regardless of the diversity in their age, background and intellectual capacity.

Having clarified the meaning of the great learning, as well as the mentality that it requires, Zhu Xi moves to the text of *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning*. Nos.7-17 allude to *Jing* 經 the portion of the Scripture of this text. All of the questions and answers from No.18 onwards refer to the portion of *Zhuan* 傳 the *Commentary*, within which Nos. 18-55 focus on the inner dimension of the great learning that contains the first five steps, which boil down to the issue of the Confucian way of personal cultivation; and Nos. 56-86 cover the final three steps, the so-called outer dimension of the great learning, which aims to extend one’s personal cultivation to a larger area, namely family, state and the whole world.

No.7 is a systematic elucidation<sup>237</sup> of his overall understanding of this newly emerged Confucian canon, in which Zhu Xi gives a lengthy philosophical interpretation of the three items: *ming mingde* 明明德 realising the enlightening virtue, *xinmin* 新民 renewing the people, and *zhiyu zhishan* 止於至善 reposing in the ultimate goodness.

The philosophical speculation unfolded here seems to have pushed Confucian thinking to a level of unprecedented complexity. For the sake of clarity, we may summarise Zhu Xi’s theoretical contribution into three: 1) Aided by philosophical concepts such as *li* 理 Principle, *qi* 氣 the cosmic matter and *yin yang* 阴阳 the negative and positive force of the universe, he has managed to establish an ontological and cosmological ground for the Confucian norms; 2) Due to his application of the two fundamental concepts *li* 理 Principle and *qi* 氣 the cosmic matter to the Confucian theory of human nature, Zhu Xi differentiates the inborn goodness and dignity of human nature from the vulnerability to temptation and the disposition to evil that derives from the

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<sup>236</sup> Daniel K. Gardner gives a brief explanation of this concept; he takes 敬 *jing* as a state of mind that is indicative of inner mental attentiveness. Daniel K. Gardner, *Learning to be a Sage* (Berkeley, 1990), 52.

<sup>237</sup> For the original text and English translation, see Appendix 3; it is too long to quote here.

constitution of the human body, hence refining the will; 3) Thanks to a new conception of learning which combines scriptural study with self-cultivation, Zhu Xi restating the necessity to perform the Confucian way of personal cultivation practiced by the ancients, the process and program of which is spelt out in *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning* in terms of the three items and the eight steps, hence act according to intellect and will.

Taking No.7 as an example, it is plain that Zhu Xi is composing a philosophical treatise in one single pair of Q&A. The form of Q&A enables him to systematically unfold the entirety of his own philosophical thinking within the framework of an ancient text, which has obviously outgrown the traditional mode of expression in commentary writing. As a philosopher he is deliberately seeking space within the Confucian tradition to accommodate the originality of his thought.

#### **1.3.1.3 The Focal Point of Q&A: A Further Exposition of the Supplement**

Zhu Xi's work on *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning* includes three integral steps: first, re-editing the text; second, writing a line-by-line commentary on it; and finally composing a collection of questions and answers concerning this scripture. Clearly *Q&A* is the result of his ceaseless pondering upon *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning* and almost represents his finishing touch to the whole project. As a continuation of Zhu Xi's exposition of the meaning of the scripture, *Q&A* does not stand on its own, and likewise cannot be understood without referring to the *Commentary*. The major theme of the *Commentary* runs through *Q&A*, and *Q&A* is deeply concerned with the most controversial issue of the *Commentary*, which is undoubtedly tied up with his most daring operation with regard to scriptural exegesis, namely writing *Bu Zhuan* 補傳 *Supplement* to it.

Among all the questions listed in *Q&A*, those regarding *Bu Zhuan* 補傳 *Supplement* are particularly indicative of intellectual challenge, and call for the kind of response that entails a higher standard of academic rigour. Zhu Xi certainly commits himself to fulfilling this challenge, and his intention to promote an academic standard for all who are engaged in the Confucian learning becomes manifest. We can assume that the sophisticated and discursive style Zhu Xi demonstrates here when dealing with the most severe challenges imposed upon him is meant to set an academic standard for Confucian learning. In formulating an answer, he always allows logical reasoning to play a leading role; as a result, authoritative views are taken as being naturally open to question rather than treated as final and as sealing the relevant discussion for good. Thus the issues

surrounding *Bu Zhuan* 補傳 *Supplement* deserve thorough discussion, and what is briefly spelt out in *Bu Zhuan* 補傳 *Supplement* needs to be extensively expounded in *Q&A*. *Bu Zhuan* 補傳 *Supplement*, as the outline of Zhu Xi's methodology, is nothing less than the life and soul of the whole system of his thought. As a thorough exposition of *Bu Zhuan* 補傳 *Supplement*, *Q&A* will then be deemed a comprehensive illustration of that methodology, initially invented by Cheng Yi, formally and systematically established by Zhu Xi and later to become the symbol of the Cheng-Zhu school. In that sense, *Q&A* is not only an expression of the intellectual capacity and academic rigour of the author, but more importantly provides Confucian scholars with a concrete example of how to develop a viewpoint into a system of thought through the application of logical reasoning and scriptural research.

*Bu Zhuan* 補傳 *Supplement* then, is merely the expression of an idea, whereas *Q&A* aims to explain how that idea is obtained and why it must be so, on the basis of logical speculation and scriptural evidence.

In order to justify this observation, it is necessary to clarify first how Zhu Xi's writing of *Q&A* (22,225 words) relates to that of *Bu Zhuan* 補傳 *Supplement* (134 words) with regard to the specific content of the two; and then how the format of *Q&A* concerning a scripture relates to the genre of a supplement to the same scripture.

#### *a) The content of Q&A in relation to The Supplement*

In a group of *Q&A* (Nos.45, 46 and 49) Zhu Xi spells out in detail the reasons for his writing *Bu Zhuan* 補傳 (*Supplement*), and elaborates upon the legitimacy of his claim to be an academic successor to Cheng Yi. The three questions are rooted in scriptural ground and proceed in a logical order, from Question 45, to Question 49 and ending with Question 46. Question 45 opens this still ongoing debate concerning Zhu Xi's *Bu Zhuan* 補傳 *Supplement*:

... you provide a Supplement to it and claim that your Supplement is in accordance with the idea of master Cheng. How do you know that the words of master Cheng will necessarily match the original meaning of the scripture? And how do you know that what you have said does not seem to be entirely derived from master Cheng?<sup>238</sup>

<sup>238</sup> Zhu Xi, *DXHW* No. 45: '子乃自謂取程子之意以補之、則程子之言何以見其必合於經意、而子之言又似不盡出於程子何耶。' *ZZQS*, 6,524.

The question arises from two levels of doubt: 1) master Cheng's reading of scripture might have already deviated from, if not distorted, the original meaning of the scripture; and 2) despite the linkage between Zhu Xi's stance and that of master Cheng, there is still a difference between what he is saying and what master Cheng has said.

Zhu Xi's answer to this question is the longest, at 1521 words.<sup>239</sup> He starts with a brief summary of Cheng Yi's teaching, and affirms that what he himself has written in *Bu Zhuan* 補傳 *Supplement* represents the essence of Cheng Yi's doctrine. He sums up Cheng Yi's teaching into two integral parts: the concrete method and procedure of carrying out *gewu zhizhi* 格物致知 the investigation of things and extension of knowledge; and the effort in *hanyang beiyuan* 涵養本源 nourishing the original source of personal cultivation, which in turn reinforces the ability to investigate things and extend knowledge. He then seeks cross-textual evidence, and attempts to demonstrate that what is emphasised in *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning* as to the priority of knowing is also articulated in other Confucian classics, despite being phrased differently. He ends by pointing out that what he is saying is based on a close examination of the logical reasoning, as well as the literal meaning of master Cheng's work, which is also verified by other Confucian classics. Therefore, he has total confidence in the truthfulness of the idea he has thus conceived and has ventured to write *Bu Zhuan* 補傳 *Supplement* under master Cheng's name.

If it is indeed the case that Zhu Xi is the legitimate successor of Cheng Yi, entitled to supplement a scripture and attribute it to Cheng Yi, then he must face another challenge: By what reason are the pupils of master Cheng, who had personally received his direct edification, disqualified from this task? Does he think none of them are perfectly capable of understanding their master's teaching? That is precisely the content of Question 49, which continues:

Ever since master Cheng interpreted the investigation of things as 'probing the Principle', his pupils have spread his teaching, which is widely seen in written books. Is there anyone who has developed his teacher's doctrine, and whose theory is of some help to the learners of the later generations?<sup>240</sup>

To this question Zhu Xi gives another lengthy response (1489 words), adopting an approach that is by nature intellectual, as evidenced by the rational rendering and the

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<sup>239</sup> For the original text and English translation, see Appendix 3.

<sup>240</sup> Zhu Xi, *DXHW* No. 49: '自程子以格物爲窮理、而其學者傳之、見於文字多矣。是亦有以發其師說而有助於後學者耶。' *ZZQS*, 6,529.

device of rhetoric deliberately employed by the author. Zhu Xi commences from a general remark on master Cheng's achievement, then draws attention to the refutable opinions of his disciples. In so doing he presents a noticeable variance between the great master and his less capable students, which disqualifies all of them from being successors to master Cheng. Finally, Zhu Xi mentions his tutor Li Tong<sup>241</sup> who, despite lacking proficiency in theoretical construction, has surpassed all the aforementioned disciples in terms of moral and spiritual practice. In this way he puts forth a constructive and feasible solution for all to follow, on account of the complexity and profundity of master Cheng's thinking as well as the intellectual capacity required of a learner to appreciate the architectonic virtue of master Cheng's work.

It is worth noting that in his answer to Question 49, Zhu Xi pinpoints the way in which each of Cheng Yi's main disciples deviates from his master's teaching, such as Lü Lantian 呂藍田, Xie Shangcai 謝上蔡, Yang Guishan 楊龜山, Yin Hejing 尹和靜, Hu Wending 胡文定, and Hu Wufeng 胡五峰. Zhu Xi discusses at length in what sense each of them fails to achieve a comprehensive knowledge of this doctrine. For instance, Lü fails to understand the dialectical relations between distinction and integration, or between particular and universal; Xie shows a deficiency derived from a state of conceptual confusion as to moral cultivation and intellectual acquisition; Yang fails to distinguish the cause from the effect, and likewise mistakes the end for the means, hence neglects the orderly procedure that ought to be followed in the practice of personal cultivation; Yin has totally overlooked the vital importance of the accumulative effort in the process of knowledge acquisition; Hu Wending falls into the tempting trap of projecting one's own moral ideals onto the external things one is about to investigate; Hu Wufeng seems to have grasped the meaning of the investigation of things; however, it is still open to question whether he has really put his words into practice.

Having listed the defective points of Cheng Yi's disciples with accuracy, Zhu Xi turns to his tutor Li Tong, taking him as the one who has put Cheng Yi's teaching into practice, irrespective of Li's inability with regard to philosophical speculation. Zhu Xi makes it clear that compared with Cheng Yi's disciples, his tutor Li Tong shows a better

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<sup>241</sup> Thus the line of the succession is presented as: Cheng Yi 程頤 - Yang Guishan 楊龜山 - Luo Yuzhang 羅豫章 - Li Tong 李侗 - Zhu Xi 朱熹, See Chen Lai 陳來, *Zhuzi Zhexue Yanjiu* 朱子哲學研究 *A Study of Zhu Xi's Philosophy* (2008), 157.



appreciation of master Cheng's teaching, and the practical points he addressed could be universally applied to all.

If Cheng Yi's disciples all miss the point one way or another, and Li Tong is the only one capable of applying the method to the practice of personal cultivation, then the burden of promoting master Cheng's teaching may fall upon Zhu Xi's shoulders. However, the question remains as to whether Zhu Xi is the most qualified person to accomplish this. After excluding all the prominent disciples of Cheng Yi from the circle of successors, Zhu Xi seems to have pushed himself to the front line, where he is obliged to demonstrate his brilliance in all aspects, both practical and intellectual, which will enable him to continue the reconstructive project started by Cheng Yi. Moreover, he has to make it transparent that academically he has a great deal to contribute to the groundwork performed by Cheng Yi.

This leads us to Question 46: "With regard to your idea, may I have the chance of hearing the entirety of your own thinking?"<sup>242</sup> Unlike other questions, which are meant to pose a challenge to the appropriateness of Zhu Xi's reading of the scripture, this one invites Zhu Xi to speak his own mind, with the aim of presenting a full picture of his thought, which signifies the specific character that may distinguish his work from that of Cheng Yi. Zhu Xi manages to accomplish this in an answer comprising 869 words, in which his philosophical speculation and the traditional Confucian notions expressed by the Confucian classics and the previous masters are fused into one, but noticeably this time he incorporates the words of the sages and the worthies into his own philosophy, not the other way around.<sup>243</sup> In answering this question, Zhu Xi is actually articulating a concise yet systematic introduction to the structure and fabric of his philosophical thinking, which, as he endeavours to prove to the reader, is deeply rooted in the Confucian tradition and shaped by the Confucian classics. At the end of this answer, Zhu Xi readdresses the issue of *Bu Zhuan* 補傳 *Supplement*, and makes it clear that although master Cheng's words are not literally repeated here, the main idea of it is not at all incompatible with Cheng's view. He then asks the reader to ponder upon

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<sup>242</sup> Zhu Xi, *DXHW* No. 46: '曰、然則吾子之意、亦可得而悉聞之乎。' *ZZQS*, 6,526.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.* No. 46: '外而至於人、則人之理不異於己也。遠而至於物、則物之理不異於人也。極其大、則天地之運、古今之變、不能外也。盡於小、則一塵之微、一息之頃、不能遺也。是乃上帝所降之衷、烝民所秉之彝、劉子所謂天地之中、夫子所謂性與天道、子思所謂天命之性、孟子所謂仁義之心、程子所謂天然自有之中、張子所謂萬物之一原、邵子所謂道之形體者。但其氣質有清濁偏正之殊、物欲有淺深。厚薄之異。是以人之與物、賢之與愚、相與懸絕而不能同耳。以其理之同、故以一人之心而於天下萬物之理無不能知。' *ZZQS*, 6,527.

the profound reason why he found it necessary to compose *Bu Zhuan* 補傳 *Supplement* under master Cheng's name.

That reason, which has become increasingly explicit in the three aforementioned questions and answers, is Zhu Xi's profound sense of mission to re-establish the orthodox line of the Confucian tradition. Such a project, according to Zhu Xi's observation, was initiated by Cheng Yi, and the kind of structure and scale unfolded in Cheng's work provides a framework for the whole reconstruction scheme. In addition, Zhu Xi sees in Cheng Yi's thought a spark of genius with sufficient power to reshuffle the Confucian scriptures and to reform the Confucian tradition, where Cheng first raises the question of *qiong li* 窮理 probing the Principle and more importantly grasps the subtle dialectic between the aim and procedure of the Confucian learning on the scriptural ground of *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning*, a point which, unfortunately, has not been well understood by his disciples.

Based on a thorough understanding of Cheng Yi's system, Zhu Xi affiliates himself with Cheng's line of thought, and attempts to perfect the work started by his master. With this intention, he embarks upon the job of revising Cheng Yi's version of *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning*, an essential part of which is to provide *Bu Zhuan* 補傳 *Supplement* to the explanation of the first two steps of the great learning, namely, the investigation of things and extension of knowledge, so that *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning* becomes a complete scripture in terms of meaning and structure.

It goes without saying that Zhu Xi is conscious of the innovative nature of *Bu Zhuan* 補傳 *Supplement*, whose legitimacy is far from self-evident. Thus, it becomes the major task of *Q&A* to justify *Bu Zhuan* 補傳 *Supplement* academically. In *Bu Zhuan* 補傳 *Supplement* a new conceptual frame is brought into being which, in contrast to the conventional one, emphasises the significance of the intellectual power inherent in the human mind, which holds the key to *qiong li* 窮理 probing the Principle. This new conceptual frame is undoubtedly of crucial importance to Zhu Xi's reconstruction of Confucianism. Although he inherits the concept of *li* 理 Principle from Cheng Yi and is also inspired by Cheng's emphasis on knowing, in particular the incorporation of action into knowledge, Zhu Xi's thinking far surpasses Cheng Yi's system when he starts to touch upon the subtle bond that bridges the quest for ontological truth, *li* 理 Principle that sustains the whole universe and also defines the nature of each individual thing, and the exploration of the inner capacity of the human mind which makes it possible

for man to *qiong li* 窮理 probing the Principle, which, in turn, defines the nature of mankind. It is only in Zhu Xi's thought that a network of the metaphysical concepts starts to emerge and prevail; in other words, the process of conceptualisation and systematisation is taking place for the first time in Zhu Xi's metaphysical thinking, which is briefly outlined in *Bu Zhuan* 補傳 *Supplement* and further systematically elaborated in *Q&A*.

In *Bu Zhuan* 補傳 *Supplement* the objectivity of the principles of things and the subjectivity of the intellective faculty of the mind are both mentioned, and the unity of the two is to be gradually fulfilled through the act of comprehending the principles of things. However, a detailed exposition is left for *Q&A*, in which we find a series of long philosophical treatises systematically formulated as answers to specific questions regarding Zhu Xi's innovative approach, characterised by an intellectual reading of the Confucian classics. That innovative element fundamentally consists in the importance he has attached to the power of knowing.<sup>244</sup>

In summary then, the depth of an answer is surely in proportion to that of the relevant question. Despite the polished language and the elegant manner in which the questions are raised, it is clear to the reader that each is backed up by a huge amount of intellectual input, and each deserves thorough discussion. In the cases where Zhu Xi gives extremely short answers, this is because these answers could be derived from the others, for all the questions and answers are closely bound up with each other and can be integrated into one. However, that does not mean that each of the questions in *Q&A* carries the same weight; the focal point of the whole book consists in the severe challenge regarding the legitimacy of *Bu Zhuan* 補傳 *Supplement*, which is seen in the three questions mentioned earlier (Nos.45, 49 and 46). The correlation of these three questions likewise requires three inter-related answers which, as a whole, suggest a continuation and progression of the discourse on this topic. Hence it is necessary to take account of logical reasoning and systematic thinking; in this case, it even entails the possibility to push such an intellectualistic disposition to the extreme.

b) *The wording and format of Q&A in relation to the Supplement*

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<sup>244</sup> A.C. Graham provides a very thoughtful analysis of the solution of the Cheng Chu school to the question of human nature. He points out that the innovation of this line of thought lies in its addressing the element of knowing. For details, see 'What is New in Cheng-Chu Theory', in Wing-tsit Chan (ed.), *Chu Hsi and Neo-Confucianism* (1986), 138-57.

Clearly *Q&A* and *Bu Zhuan* 補傳 *Supplement* are representative of two different types of format and wording. In general a supplement to a scripture, by virtue of its existence, suggests a reformative intention, the aim to complete and perfect that scripture. Hence the wording of a supplement, irrespective of its innovative nature, must fit perfectly into the original text in terms of its style, length and, more importantly, tone. In contrast, the format of *Q&A* concerning a scripture is indicative of the distinction between the questions arising from the scripture and the text of the scripture itself; hence the wording of *Q&A* does not necessarily match the style of the original text.

In the case of Zhu Xi, both *Q&A* and *Bu Zhuan* 補傳 *Supplement* reflect his innovative work on the same scripture, *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning*. The difference is that *Q&A*, as a collection of questions and answers concerning the scripture, does not touch on the integral part of that scripture, but focuses solely on developing an in-depth explanation and interpretation of it; whereas *Bu Zhuan* 補傳 *Supplement* is working directly from the interior of the scripture, with a clear aspiration to complete the existing text by means of revealing a perfect structure and profound meaning. In short, *Bu Zhuan* 補傳 *Supplement* sits within, whereas *Q&A* stands outside of the text of *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning*.

Remaining outside the core of *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning*, *Q&A* is meant to reveal the details of the debate so as to provide a full account of the mental wrestling between the two sides: one raises a question and the other gives an answer. The overall purpose is to unfold a vivid picture of the rigorous academic debate between the two sides, rather than presenting a monologue. The language appropriate to this end will be by no means proclamatory or aphoristic; on the contrary, it ought to be logical, analytical and rhetorical. In that sense, the format of *Q&A* opens up a new channel for Zhu Xi to exercise his philosophical speculation through logical reasoning, which allows him to express his thought in his own way. It is precisely on this point that Zhu Xi detaches his mode of expression from the predominant style of the scriptural text, that of proclamation and aphorism.

Zhu Xi's intention to promote logical reasoning within the Confucian tradition is obvious, but such an aspiration cannot be explained solely by his personal academic interest and disposition; rather, it is deeply entangled with the urgent need of Confucianism for self-transformation, without which the Confucian moral precepts passed down from the ancients may lose their appropriateness to the current situation

and stop making sense to the people of the day. To Zhu Xi, both a logical and reasonable interpretation of the Confucian morals and a comprehension of the reasons for these morals are necessary, as he explains in the answer to Question 34, in which he is accused of imposing a farfetched interpretation upon the scriptural text concerning the five moral virtues exemplified by King Wen: *ren* 仁 humaneness, *jing* 敬 respectfulness, *xiao* 孝 filial piety, *ci* 慈 kindness and *xin* 信 faithfulness, which arise from the three types of relations – lord and subject, father and son, and the inter-personal relationship as a citizen.

In his *Da Xue Zhang ju* 大學章句 *Commentary on The Great Learning*, Zhu Xi directly encourages the reader to first seek a deep understanding of the five morals, and then extend this knowledge to the understanding of others. He goes on to point out that advancing in this way would enable a person to find the perfect resting place whilst dealing with things and affairs in the world. To some, what Zhu Xi puts in his commentary are ‘superfluous’ and ‘too far from the original’ in comparison with the scriptural text.<sup>245</sup> In response to this criticism Zhu Xi defends his interpretation in four aspects. Facing the accusation of being ‘superfluous’, Zhu Xi starts his refutation by clarifying the difference between the two modes of expression, to generalise and to reason:

Concerning the sketch of the morals and a general name for all of them, one word or sentence might suffice. However, when it comes to the reasons for that, one word or sentence may never be enough to expound the beginning and the end, the essential and the accidental of it.<sup>246</sup>

He admits it is necessary to be concise when giving a sketch or a general name, which applies to the style of the scriptural text here. However, in the situation where one is expected to give reasons for a general name, a detailed explanation will be called for, which entails the task of expounding ‘the beginning and the end’ as well as ‘the essential and the accidental’; clearly it takes more than one word or sentence to spell all these out. With regard to reasoning, it is not appropriate merely to point to the importance of being concise, let alone to take concision as the only standard upon which to base a criticism.

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<sup>245</sup> Zhu Xi, *DXHW* No. 34: ‘曰、五者之目、詞約而義該矣。子之說乃復有所謂究其精微之蘊、而推類以通之者。何其言之衍而不切耶。’ *ZZQS*, 6,520.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.* No. 34: ‘曰、舉其德之要而總名之、則一言足矣。論其所以爲是一言者、則其始終本末豈一言之所能盡哉。’ *ZZQS*, 6,520.

The implication will be that those who take his words as ‘superfluous’ have failed to understand the fundamental difference between scriptural writing and commentary writing. As a result, they take it for granted that the style of a scriptural text should be extensively applied to the composition of a commentary; thus the difference in style between the original text and Zhu Xi’s commentary becomes problematic to them.

Zhu Xi makes it very clear that the conciseness of the scriptural words only serves to provide a general idea or name; when it comes to expounding the reasons for it, a concise expression will be inadequate, thus a different form of expression is called for. To Zhu Xi a commentary on a scripture is intended to enrich the meaning of that scripture, but that does not entail the necessity of adhering to the manner in which the scriptural text is formulated. On the contrary, the style most appropriate to a commentary arises from the proceeding of the logical reasoning on a specific topic, and could be totally different from that of the scripture on which a commentary is based.

Having clarified the theoretical need for logical reasoning with regard to the writing of a commentary, Zhu Xi turns to the practical side and points out knowing the name of a moral concept without grasping the reasons for holding that name will incur unfavourable consequences. From his perspective, it is clear that to put a moral concept into practice entails a proper understanding of it. Therefore, in practical terms it becomes even more urgent to bring forward the issue of reasoning, as it is essential to the preservation of the Confucian morals in reality.

As well as seeking the reasons for the five morals, Zhu Xi invites the reader to extend his knowledge concerning this subject to the understanding of other things and affairs. The aforementioned morals do not form a full picture of the Confucian morality, but cover only three of the five cardinal moral relations promoted by Confucianism. In that sense, it is necessary to extend the understanding of the five morals to the whole of Confucian morality, and further extend it beyond the realm of morality, in Zhu Xi’s term, ‘*jìn tianxia zhili* 盡天下之理 *to probe all the principles in the world*’. This clearly relates to what he has written in *Bu Zhuan* 補傳 *Supplement*.

Taking Question 34 as an example, we see that in formulating a fourfold answer to this question, Zhu Xi is trying to disclose the background knowledge that supports the two sentences given in *Da Xue Zhangju* 大學章句 *Commentary on The Great Learning*. On the one hand, he reveals the original ideas he has obtained from a long dedication to scriptural learning, and on the other he hints at his ambition to reconstruct Confucianism by means of rereading and reinterpreting the Confucian scriptures.

Therefore, what Zhu Xi has accomplished in *Q&A* is far more than to refute criticism and justify his way of doing commentary; the debate unfolded in *Q&A* is also indicative of a revolutionary and destructive operation in the sense that Zhu Xi's refutation actually undermines the ground upon which the criticism is predicated. That ground, put simply, would be the old scholarship expressed in particular by the Han scriptural learning. Thus it becomes clear that the importance of *Q&A* goes far beyond that of a footnote to *Da Xue Zhangju* 大學章句 *Commentary on The Great Learning*, and a footnote to a footnote in relation to *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning*. The real significance lies in the fact that in *Daxue Huowen* 大學或問 *Q&A concerning The Great Learning* Zhu Xi gains the freedom to systematically elucidate the innovative ideas he has read into the Confucian scriptures. Indeed, in this book more clearly than in any other is seen the birth of a new paradigm, one that is intended to encapsulate the whole picture of the Song scholarship.

### **1.3.2 Systematic Elucidation as the Paradigm of the Song Scholarship**

As a tradition of thought, Confucianism has taken various forms to express itself. A glimpse of the intellectual trends or paradigms developed over the periods before and after the Song will help us to understand the uniqueness of the Song scholarship.

For the sake of clarity, we divide the pre-Song Confucianism into four stages: the formative age of Confucianism in the pre-Qin 先秦 period (-221B.C.); the professionalization of Confucianism in the Qin 秦 (221B.C -206B.C.) and Han 漢 periods (206B.C.-220A.D.); the further expansion of Confucianism in the Wei-Jin 魏晉 (220-420) and the South-North Dynasties 南北朝 (420-589); the integration of literature into Confucianism in the Sui 隋 (581-618) and Tang 唐 Dynasties (618-907).

Due to an unprecedented reconstruction project, a transition of intellectual paradigm occurred in the Song 宋 Dynasty (960-1227) which ushered in the era of Neo-Confucianism. The legacy of the Song scholarship as a whole has long been regarded as a conscientious aspiration for system and structure.

Although the theoretical reconstruction of Confucianism initiated by the Song masters continued to develop in the following Yuan 元 (1271-1368) and Ming 明 (1368-1644) Dynasties, the Ming thinkers no longer focus their attention on system-building. It is justified to say that the framework had been completed by the great minds of the Song; the contribution of the Ming masters consists mainly in their driving home the

inwardness or subtlety of the Confucian way of self-reflection;<sup>247</sup> as a result this age sees more light being shed upon the dimension of an individual's personal progress in moral and spiritual practice. The grand vision of the Song literati was gradually fading into the background and finally gave way to the enthusiasm for an idealistic view of world, and the philosophical speculation once flourished in the Song was gradually diverted into the dimension of personal experience.<sup>248</sup>

The linguistic turn that occurred during the period of the Qing 清 Dynasty (1644-1912) marks a systematic defiance of the Song scholarship, and the revival of the Han scriptural learning that took place in the mid-Qing period represents the peak of intellectualism in Confucian history.<sup>249</sup> But the intellectualistic character of the Qing scholarship is overwhelmingly expressed through attentiveness to the details rather than system and structure; likewise the quest for historical authenticity has replaced the pursuit of ontological truth. According to the academic standard upheld by the erudite Qing scholars, the philosophical speculation carried out by their predecessors in the Song is no more than empty words born of irredeemable subjectivity. Unsurprisingly the theme of ontological quest of the Song is by no means fully retained in the philology of the Qing, and under the intellectualistic climate of the Qing the aspiration for system and structure is often ridiculed as a symptom of deficiency in both scriptural learning and academic rigour. Generally speaking, the Qing intellectuals are more inclined to affiliate with the methodology promoted by the of the Han commentators. The revival

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<sup>247</sup> The quest for a genuine method of sage-making plays a more significant role in the Ming period compared with the Song, and was discussed at length by the Ming masters. From a historical perspective, this question was initially brought to light by Chen Baisha 陳白沙, but a mature theory of this new method of sage-making was only achieved in Wang Yangming. The continuity between the two masters was particularly stressed by Huang Zongxi, see 'Baisha Xue An 白沙學案 Anthology of Chen Baisha', in Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 (ed.), *Ming Ru Xue An 明儒學案 Anthology of the Ming Confucian Masters* (Beijing, 2008), *Juan* 5, 1,79-109.

<sup>248</sup> This generalisation does not apply to the spirit of the late Ming masters. In his unpublished work 清儒學案 *Anthology of the Qing Confucian Masters*, Qian Mu speaks of the late Ming and early Qing as sharing the same scholarship and thus classifies the two as the first stage of the Qing scholarship. See Chen Zuwu 陳祖武, 'Qianbinsi Xianshen yu Qingru Xuean 錢賓四先生與清儒學案 Qian Mu and his Anthology of the Qing Confucian Masters', <http://www.qingstudy.com/data/articles/a03/25.html>

<sup>249</sup> Yu Yingshi 余英時, *Lun Daizhen yu Zhang Xuecheng-Qingdai Zhongqi Xueshu Sixiangshi Yanjiu 論戴震與章學誠—清代中期學術思想史研究 Discourse on Daizhen and Zhang Xuecheng - A Study of the Intellectual History in the Period of Mid-Qing* (Hong Kong, 1976).

For a detailed discussion of the meaning of intellectualism in the context of Chinese thought, see Yu Yingshi 余英時, 'Zhongguo Sixiangshi shangde Zhishilun yu Fanzhishilun 中國思想史上的智識論與反智識論 Intellectualism and Anti-Intellectualism in the History of Chinese Thought', in Yu Yingshi, *Renwen yu Lixing de Zhongguo 人文與理性的中國 Humanity and Rationality in China*, trans. by Cheng Nensheng 程嫩生 and Luo Qun 羅群, (Taibei, 2008), 190-6.



of the Han scholarship in the Qing academia constitutes a significant part of its reaction against the paradigm of the Song scholarship, of which Zhu Xi is doubtless the protagonist.<sup>250</sup>

Like other traditions of thought Confucianism has its own character and also proceeds according to its inner logic. However when it comes to the contributive factors which triggered the Neo-Confucian movement the stimulus of Buddhism should never be overlooked. The aspiration for system and the search for a new language or even a new literary form expressed by the Song Confucian masters cannot be easily understood without taking into account the compelling force of Buddhism, in particular the prevailing trend of *Chan Zong* 禪宗 Zen in the Song. Generally speaking the school of Zen Buddhism has an immense and enduring influence on the thinking of the Song literati. The Song masters in one way or another give their response to the theoretical challenge of the Buddhist teaching. In both Cheng Yi's *Cui Yan* 粹言<sup>251</sup> and Zhu Xi's *Yu Lei* 語類 (*juan* 4, 126) we see both the criticism of Buddhism and records of the interaction between a Confucian learner and a Zen Master. Like many other Confucian scholars of the Song, Zhu Xi in his youth was fascinated by Zen, the eulogy *Ji Kaishan Qianchanshi Wen* 《祭开善谦禅师文》 he composed for Dao Qian 道謙 (?-1152) gives us an indication as to his engagement with Zen in his early years.<sup>252</sup> According to the research of Shu Jingnan, Zhu Xi had personally seen both Dao Qian 道謙 and his master Zonggao 宗杲 (1089 -1163)-the one who formally established the line of 'kanhua chan 看話禪 meditation on a word or phrase'. It is very likely that Zhu Xi in his youth was not only fascinated by the teaching of Zonggao 宗杲, but also practised the method of 'kanhua chan 看話禪 meditation on a word or phrase'. More importantly Zonggao 宗杲's sharp criticism of the method of 'mozhaohan 默照禪 meditation on silent

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<sup>250</sup> Dai Zhen's sharp criticism of Zhu Xi is seen in his *Menzi Ziyi Shuzheng* 孟子字義疏證; for English translation of this text, see Ann-ping Chin and Mansfield Freeman (trans.), Tai Chen's *On Mencius: Explorations in Words and Meaning* (Yale, 1990).

<sup>251</sup> Cheng Yi: '子謂門人曰：昨日之會，談空寂者紛紛，吾有所不能。噫！此風既成，其何能救也？古者釋氏盛時，尚只是崇像設教，其害小爾。今之言者，乃及乎性命道德，謂佛為不可不學，使明智之士先受其惑。嗚呼！清談甚，晉室衰，況有甚者乎！夫明智之士，中人以上之資也，其才足以自立，則反之難矣。學者必至於自信，而不惑，則彼不能亂。不然，猶之淫言美色，戒而遠之，尚恐不免也。' 'Henan Chengshi Cuiyan 河南程氏粹言 Essential Sayings of the Two Cheng Masters', *Juan* 1, *Er Cheng Ji* 二程集 *Works of the Two Chengs* (1981), 4, 1196.

<sup>252</sup> According to the research of Shu Jingnan, Zhu Xi had personally met both Dao Qian 道謙 (?-1152) and his master Zonggao 宗杲 (1089-1163). See Shu Jingnan 束景南, *Zhu Xi Yanjiu* 朱熹研究 *A Study of Zhu Xi* (Beijing, 2008), 46-53.

This story is also found in *ZZYL*, *Juan* 104: '某年十五六時，亦嘗留心於此。一日在病翁所會一僧，與之語。其僧只相應和了說，也不說是不是。卻與劉說，某也理會得個昭昭靈靈底禪。劉后說與某，某遂疑此僧更有要妙處在，遂去扣問他，見他說得也煞好。' *ZZQS*, 17, 3437-8.

illumination' may also have an enduring impact on Zhu Xi's critique of Zen from a Confucian standpoint.

It is beyond the scope of this study to examine Zhu Xi's affinity with Zen throughout his long academic career.<sup>253</sup> What we intend to explore here is the relation of Zhu Xi's doctrine of *gewu zhizhi* 格物致知 the investigation of things and extension of knowledge to the teaching of Zen. It goes without saying that his severe criticism of Zen is derived from a profound and sympathetic understanding of it, which of course serves apologetic purposes. From the Confucian standpoint, Zhu Xi conceives the doctrine of Zen as defective and incomplete, meaning it only contains the upper part and lacks the lower part. He explains that in the Confucian context: 'What is meant by the enlightening virtue refers to the miraculous and unobscured spiritual nature that man receives from Heaven, which therefore contains the multiple principles and responds to all things and affairs in the world accordingly.' But, 'from the perspective of Zen this spiritual nature is merely understood as something miraculous and unobscured, which is totally devoid of the multiple principles'.<sup>254</sup> For Zhu Xi the doctrine of Zen Buddhism fails to thoroughly integrate spirituality into humanity, this kind of spirituality promoted by Zen Buddhism consequently lacks a foothold in the realm of human life, which inevitably leaves the Zen practitioners nowhere to turn with regard to family problems and social and political affairs.

On that basis, Zhu Xi claims, the Confucian teaching as presented in *Da Xue* 大學 (*The Great Learning*) is more complete and advanced than the doctrine of Zen, as it will lead one to a broader horizon, meaning to apply one's personal spiritual awareness to the reconstruction of the social and political order in this world.<sup>255</sup> The intention to overcome the impact of Zen has a significant part to play in Zhu Xi's work on *Da Xue* 大學 (*The Great Learning*), especially in his philosophical interpretation of *gewu zhizhi* 格物致知 (the investigation of things and extension of knowledge). His emphasis on *gewu* 格物 is meant to make a connection with things in the world, so as to substitute

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<sup>253</sup> See Qian Mu 錢穆, 'Zhu Xi Lun Chanxue 朱子論禪學 Zhu Xi's Remarks on the Teaching of Zen', in *Zhuzixue Tigang 朱子學提綱 An Outline of the Study of Zhu Xi* (Beijing, 2002), 142-50.

Yu Ying-shi, 'Intellectual Breakthroughs in the T'ang-Sung Transition', in Willard J. Peterson, Andrew H. Plaks and Ying-shih Yu (eds.), *The Power of Culture* (Hong Kong, 1994), 158-71.

This question is also discussed by Julia Ching in her *The Religious Thought of Chu Hsi* (Oxford & New York, 2000), 171-89.

<sup>254</sup> Zhu Xi, ZZYL, Juan 14: '明德者，人之所得乎天，而虛靈不昧，以具眾理而應萬事者也。禪家則但以虛靈不昧者為性，而無以具眾理以下之事。偶錄' ZZQS, 14,439.

<sup>255</sup> Zhu Xi, ZZYL, Juan 12: '今說求放心，說來說去，卻似釋老說入定一般。但彼到此便死了；吾輩卻要得此心主宰得定，方賴此做事業，所以不同也。大雅錄' ZZQS, 14,362.

the contemplation of Zen, namely *yi xin guan xin* 以心觀心 (to reflect upon mind with mind itself), likewise the importance he attaches to *zhi* 知 (intellect, knowledge or knowing) suggests a link with the prevailing Buddhist terminologies such as *shi* 識 (consciousness), *jue* 覺 (awareness), or *wu* 悟 (realisation). Moreover the gradual process of accumulation and the sudden breakthrough involved in *gewu zhizhi* 格物致知 (the investigation of things and extension of knowledge) indicate a solution to the debate over *jianxiu* 漸修 (gradual practice) and *dunwu* 頓悟 (immediate enlightenment) within the school of Zen. Bearing the subtle defects of Zen doctrine in mind,<sup>256</sup> Zhu Xi attempts to formulate a methodology that will integrate the internal and the external, this world and the world beyond into one without dissolving the distinction between them.

As pointed out by Qian Mu and others, Zhu Xi's system of thought is basically an integration of Qin-Han Confucianism and the widespread Buddhist doctrines in Tang and Song.<sup>257</sup> Qian sees parallels between Zhu Xi with Zong Mi 宗密 (780-841), who was renowned for being a master situated within two prominent schools of the Chinese Buddhism- *Chan zong* 禪宗 Zen and *Hua Yan zong* 華嚴宗. According to Qian Mu, distinctive of Zhu Xi's system is to integrate different schools of thought into one (*hehui yiqie* 和會一切), whereas Lu Xiang Shan is characterised by a method which is meant to wipe everything out (*saodang yiqie* 掃蕩一切).<sup>258</sup> In spite of their differences in methodology, the great minds of the Song all agree on the goal of Confucian learning- to attain sagehood, and they share a deep-rooted intention to push the Confucian moralistic disposition beyond the level of its customary appropriateness, and further transform it into the truth of eternal legitimacy and universal applicability. The Song Confucian masters in their critique of Buddhism, in their personal interaction with the Zen masters of the time, have already brought Buddhist terminologies and questions into their own thinking.

<sup>256</sup> Zhu Xi does not make a distinction between the different schools of Buddhism, although names of these schools of thought are mentioned. As presented in *Yu Lei* 語類 he seems to take it for granted that Zen is the representative of Buddhism, which is understandable given the popularity of Zen in that age.

<sup>257</sup> Qian Mu 錢穆, 'Chanzong yu Lixue 禪宗與理學 The School of Zen Buddhism and the school of the Principle', in *Zhongguo Xueshu Sixiangshi Luncong* 中國學術思想史論叢 *Essays on the Study of the Intellectual History of China* (Taipei, 1976), 4,231.

<sup>258</sup> Qian Mu 錢穆: '我們若把宋學演進勉強擬之佛學, 則初期宋學如小乘, 濂溪橫渠如大乘空有二宗, 二程如台禪諸家, 到南渡後的第三期宋學, 便要到了和會一切與掃蕩一切的時代。朱子是和會一切者, 象山是掃蕩一切者, 若謂朱子如宗密, 則象山是馬祖。' 'Zhuzi Xueshu Shuping 朱子學術述評 A Description of and Remark on the Scholarship of Zhu Xi', in *Zhongguo Xueshu Sixiangshi Luncong* 中國學術思想史論叢 *Essays on the Study of the Intellectual History of China* (Taipei, 1976), 5,159.

Having clarified the main characteristics of the Song scholarship with reference to other forms of Confucian learning, we now come back to Zhu Xi, and discuss his specific contribution to the making of this paradigm. We will particularly look at 1) in what sense it is justified to say that Zhu Xi formally established a paradigm for the Song scholarship; and 2) what implications this paradigm may have presented still bear significance today.

### **1.3.2.1 Setting Up a New Paradigm for the Song Scholarship**

In comparison with the massive secondary literature surrounding *Da Xue Zhangju* 大學章句 (*Commentary on The Great Learning*), *Daxue Huowen* 大學或問 (*Q&A concerning The Great Learning*) seems to be relatively neglected by the current study of Zhu Xi.<sup>259</sup> This text is often conceived as a footnote or complementary to *Commentary*, as a result, the systematic, clear and precise expression of his philosophical thinking which is peculiar to *Q&A* has not been given much thought. Indeed the discursive, analytic style Zhu Xi particularly demonstrated in *Q&A* suggests his effort in searching for a new literary form,<sup>260</sup> which echoes the Song masters' aspiration for system and structure. If we take *Da Xue Zhangju* 大學章句 *Commentary on The Great Learning* as a master piece of Zhu Xi's exegetical composition, then *Daxue Huowen* 大學或問 *Q&A concerning The Great Learning* should be conceived as a master piece of his philosophical composition. Nowhere sees more clearly than in this text a systematic elucidation of the ideal pattern of learning Zhu Xi bears in mind, which implies the concrete standards Zhu Xi sets up for what he means by the orthodox Confucian learning.

Unsurprisingly as in many other places Zhu Xi holds that the work of master Cheng exemplifies an ideal pattern of scholarship, which unfortunately has been deformed in various ways when being passed on to his disciples. By attributing the ideal to the work of his predecessor Cheng Yi, Zhu Xi spells out the criteria that he himself applies when judging the work of the preceding masters. The question of whether or not Zhu Xi's remarks do justice to Cheng Yi and his disciples is another question; what we focus upon here is the academic standard that Zhu Xi has in mind; to be precise, what Zhu Xi means by a comprehensive and perfect system when attributing such an ideal pattern to

<sup>259</sup> We have not seen an exclusive research on this text in the Chinese-speaking world, and despite the thriving of Confucianism over the last few decades in North America and in Europe, there is no English translation of this text so far.

<sup>260</sup> This question has been addressed by Chen Shaoming 陈少明 in his 'Sishu Xitong de Lunshuo Jiegou 四书系统的论说结构 Structure of the Discourse as Presented in the System of The Four Books', in Liu Xiaogan 刘笑敢 (ed.), *Zhongguo Zhixue yu Wenhua* 中国哲学与文化 *Chinese Philosophy and Culture* 9 (2011), 219-51.

master Cheng. To clarify this, it is necessary to look closely at the original text and let Zhu Xi speak for himself.

‘Master Cheng’s teaching is close to oneself without neglecting things; based upon the genuine capacity for praxis without forsaking the effect of the written words; reaches the mighty parts without ignoring the minor aspects; and probes into the refined without overlooking the crude.’<sup>261</sup>

According to Zhu Xi’s observation, it is only in Cheng Yi’s system that such an ideal has been fully realised, because the massive structure of Cheng Yi’s thought allows room for ‘*ji* 己 *self*’ and ‘*wu* 物 *things*’, ‘*xingshi zhishi* 行事之實 *capacity for praxis*’ and ‘*wenzi zhigong* 文字之功 *the effect of the written words*’, ‘*da* 大 *the mighty*’ and ‘*xiao* 小 *the minor*’, and ‘*jing* 精 *the refined*’ as well as ‘*cu* 粗 *the crude*’. In comparison, the doctrine of Zen Buddhism attaches too much importance to the so-called ‘*self*’, ‘*the refined*’ or ‘*the mighty*’, at the risk of neglecting the external things, of forsaking ‘the written words’ and of discarding ‘the minor’ or ‘the crude’.

In his remark on Cheng Yi’s thought Zhu Xi highlights the theoretical construction of a system of thought as well as its significance in real life. He sums up the perfect nature of master Cheng’s work into four points, which are grammatically formulated in the same structure: ‘...without...’, and what comes before and after the word ‘without’ forms a contrast in meaning. The first line serves as an overall view on Cheng Yi’s philosophical thinking, followed in the next three sentences by some more specific observations.

In the first sentence the phrase ‘*qie yu ji* 切於己 *close to oneself*’ refers to Cheng Yi’s idea of ‘*han yang* 涵養’ (nourishing the self-nature), and ‘*bu yi yu wu* 不遺於物 *without neglecting things*’ pertains to the other line of his thought, ‘*jìn xue* 進學’ (advancing the learning). Using the same logic, the contents of the next three sentences all refer to the two seemingly contrasted themes.

The two main themes in Cheng Yi are often presented as running parallel to one another, but in Zhu Xi’s expression ‘*qie yu ji er bu yi yu wu* 切於己而不遺於物 *close to oneself without neglecting things*’ the two are fused into one. By summing up the outline of Cheng Yi’s thought in one sentence, Zhu Xi underlines the importance of the inter-dependence between the two. Seen in this light, the upholding of self-cultivation

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<sup>261</sup> Zhu Xi, *DXHW* No. 49: ‘程子之說、切於己而不遺於物、本於行事之實而不廢文字之功、極其大而不畧其小、究其精而不忽其粗。’ *ZZQS*, 6,529.

should not contradict the concern for the things in this world; likewise the achievement of self-realisation ought not to be based on the negation of external things. Contrariwise, the realisation of one's own nature lies in probing the principles of things. So the central question here is how to integrate the investigation of things with the realisation of one's own nature. To Zhu Xi the perfect nature of Cheng Yi's system consists in the structure, which embraces both the obtaining of self-realisation and the acquisition of the knowledge of the things in the world.

The two predominant themes in Cheng Yi's thought - '*han yang* 涵養' (nourishing the self-nature) and '*jin xue* 進學' (advancing the learning)- continue to occupy the centre of Zhu Xi's system, but the meaning of each line has been broadened and deepened. More importantly Zhu Xi lays emphasis on the correlation between the two, so that they are presented as mutually complementing one another. Such a dialectical nature of Zhu Xi's presentation characterises the originality of his thinking with reference Cheng Yi and other preceeding masters, and also holds the key to the sophisticated structure of his system.

The complexity of Zhu Xi's thought is mainly derived from his sustained attempt to overcome the idealistic stance represented by Zen Buddhism and partly shared by *xin xue* 心學 the school of mind, and in the meantime to transcend dualistic mode of thinking and expressing. With an intention to construct a more comprehensive system, Zhu Xi addresses both *xin* 心 mind and *li* 理 Principle. Although he declares that *li* 理 Principle can only be known by *xin* 心 mind, there seems to be an unavoidable dichotomy between the most fundamental concepts of his thought.<sup>262</sup> For many the link between *xin* 心 mind

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<sup>262</sup> It is beyond the scope of this study to discuss at length Zhu Xi's metaphysical thinking, of which the major part is his doctrine of *li* 理 Principle. A detailed elaboration on the meaning of *li* 理 Principle is found in *Yu Lei* 語類 *Conversations Juan* 1 and 2. According to what he says in this text, we may term his philosophy as a kind of realism with regard to his refutation of the Buddhist notion of *xing kong* 性空 nonsubstantiality. However, it should be noted that Zhu Xi has no intention to make *li* 理 a transcendent entity that admits of separate existence; his emphasis is rather on the commonality of it, which can be substantiated by his identifying *li* 理 Principle with *xing* 性 nature, so that *li* 理 is rooted in each particular thing and defines the existence of it. To apply this to the Confucian notion of human nature, Zhu Xi believes the four principal Confucian virtues - *ren* 仁 humaneness, *yi* 義 righteousness, *li* 禮 propriety and *zhi* 智 wisdom - are the embodiment of *li* 理 Principle in each of us. His subordinating *xin* 心 mind to *li* 理 Principle derives not from his lacking confidence in *xin* 心 mind, but rather from his recognition of the complexity involved in understanding human nature. For Zhu Xi the innate goodness of human nature that has been discovered by the ancient sages only indicates the ideal state; in reality the natural state of *xin* 心 mind does not always conform to *li* 理 Principle, hence the need to cultivate *xin* 心 mind. Only after the effort in the cultivation of *xin* 心 mind reaches perfection, will it be proper to identify *xin* 心 mind with *li* 理 Principle, or to claim the unification of the two.

and *li* 理 Principle, in practical terms *xiu xin* 修心 the cultivation of mind and *qiong li* 窮理 the probing of Principle is problematic and needs to be substantiated.

Zhu Xi's solution to this problem is to quest for the dialectical relation between the concept of *xin* 心 mind and that of *li* 理 Principle, so as to rectify a dualistic understanding which simply refers *xin* 心 mind and *li* 理 Principle to the internal and external dimensions respectively of the Confucian learning. Question 47 sees Zhu Xi's response to the typical challenge imposed upon the methodology of the Cheng-Zhu school.

Question: Your method of learning seems to be seeking truth in the visible traces rather than in your mind, resorting to the external instead of the internal. I am afraid the learning of the sages should by no means appear as superficial and fragmented as yours.

Answer: What one seeks in his learning, is nothing but mind and Principle. Although the mind seems to serve as the commander of the body, its intelligence does possess the power to grasp all the principles under the Heaven in terms of its substance. Whereas Principle is pervading in ten thousands of things, its subtle and miraculous function consists in each individual mind. Thus fundamentally speaking, it is not appropriate to attribute the external to Principle and the internal to the mind, nor is it justified to classify one as the refined, the other as the crude. However, the one who is not aware of the intelligence of the mind, will under no circumstance probe the wonder of the principles due to the disordered and scattered condition of his mind. Should one fail to have a glimpse of the wonder of the principles and makes no attempt to probe it, one will remain stubborn and narrow-minded and the power of mind will never be fulfilled. Thus Principle and mind depend upon each other.

Based on the above understanding, the sages, in establishing their teachings, always on the one hand lead one to be aware of the intelligence of mind, to preserve it in his civility, quietness, and concentration, and to take it as his substantial ability to probe the principles; on the other hand, lead one to believe the existence of the wonder of the principles, and then seek for it in intellectual inquiries and discussions so as to exhaust the function of the mind. In that sense, the explicit is contained in the implicit, the animated is nurtured in tranquillity, and vice versa. There is no need to initially distinguish the external from the

internal, or make a choice between the refined and the crude. After one gradually accumulates one's efforts to a certain point, one will see the unity of mind and Principle and realise there is no such thing as the division between the internal and the external, between the refined and the crude.

Should one insist to regard this method of learning as superficial and fragmented, and intend to advocate another kind of learning which is devoid of forms and shapes, and seems to be profound, sophisticated and inaccessible, the one who is to take up this kind of learning will be taught to dwell on the realm to which no human language can obtain access. Those who keep saying that 'you must seek for truth in this way so that you may get there one day' are the followers of Buddhism nowadays. Such is the harm of their heretical doctrine that it will ruin the orthodox learning practised by the ancients whose purpose of learning lies only in the realisation of the enlightening virtue and in renewing the people.<sup>263</sup>

When accused of promoting a '*qianjin* 淺近 *superficial*' and '*zhili* 支離 *fragmented*' way of learning, Zhu Xi starts to disclose the subtle inter-dependence between *xin* 心 mind and *li* 理 Principle, whereby the method of the Cheng-Zhu school will be substantiated by the mutuality between the two, be it *xin* 心 mind and *li* 理 Principle, or the internal and the external. In his words, the *ti* 體 substance of *xin* 心 mind consists in *li* 理 Principle, and the *yong* 用 function of *li* 理 Principle lies in *xin* 心 mind. Through

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<sup>263</sup> Zhu Xi, *DXHW* No. 47: '然則子之爲學、不求諸心而求諸迹、不求之內而求之外。吾恐聖賢之學不如是之淺近而支離也。然則子之爲學、不求諸心而求諸迹、不求之內而求之外。吾恐聖賢之學不如是之淺近而支離也。曰、人之所以爲學、心與理而已矣。心雖主乎一身、而其體之虛靈足以管乎天下之理。理雖散在萬物、而其用之微妙實不外乎一人之心、初不可以內外精粗而論也。然或不知此心之靈而無以存之、則昏昧雜擾而無以窮衆理之妙。不知衆理之妙而無以窮之、則偏狹固滯而無以盡此心之全。此其理勢之相須、蓋亦有必然者。是以聖人設教、使人默識此心之靈、而存之於端莊靜一之中、以爲窮理之本、使人知有衆理之妙、而窮之於學問思辨之際、以致盡心之功。巨細相涵、動靜交養、初未嘗有內外精粗之擇。及其眞積力久而豁然貫通焉、則亦有以知其渾然一致、而果無內外精粗之可言矣。今必以是爲淺近支離、而欲藏形匿影、別爲一種幽深恍惚艱難阻絕之論、務使學者莽然措其心於文字言語之外、而曰道必如此、然後可以得之、則是近世佛學詖淫邪遁之尤者、而欲移之以亂古人明德新民之實學。其亦誤矣。' *ZZQS*, 6,528-9.

Here Zhu Xi seems to have answered the question posed by Wang Yangming; the difference in the wording of the two thinkers suggests that the inter-dependence between *xin zhi ti* 心之體 the substance of the mind and *li zhi yong* 理之用 the function of the Principle as presented in Zhu Xi *Q&A* is not retained in Wang Yangming's question, but is transformed into the relation between *wu xin* 吾心 my mind and *wu li* 物理 the principles of the particular things. This small change gives a clear indication that the subtlety and complexity of Zhu Xi's discourse on *xin* 心 mind and *li* 理 Principle are not fully appreciated by a great Ming master like Wang Yangming.

For the text regarding Wang Yangming's disagreement with Zhu Xi, see Wang Yangming 王陽明, 'Da Gu Dongqiao Shu 答顧東橋書 Letter to Gu Dongqiao': '夫物理不外於吾心，外吾心而求物理，無物理矣。遺物理而求吾心，吾心又何物耶？心之體，性也，性即理也。故有孝親之心，即有孝之理，無孝親之心，即無孝之理矣。有忠君之心，即有忠之理，無忠君之心，即無忠之理矣。理豈外於吾心耶？晦菴謂人之所以爲學者，心與理而已。心雖主乎一身，而實管乎天下之理；理雖散於萬事，而實不外乎一人之心。是其一分一合之間，而未免已啟學者心理爲二之弊。' 'Yaojiang Xuean 姚江學案 Anthology of Yaojiang', in Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 (ed.), *Ming Ru Xue An* 明儒學案 Anthology of the Ming Confucian Masters (2008), 1,193, Juan 10.



expounding the dialectical relation between the two, Zhu Xi makes it clear that the accusation is deeply rooted in a dualistic mentality in this regard. For those who are unable to outgrow a dualistic way of thinking, the methodology of the Cheng-Zhu school, which gives priority to the investigation of things, has diverted the attention from the internal to the external, hence in defiance of the Confucian tradition. So long as the dualistic perspective is overcome, the charge will automatically be reversed, and the approach advocated by the Cheng-Zhu school is thus substantiated by the dialectical thinking derived from Zhu Xi's philosophy.

In this respect the most original and innovative element of his philosophy lies in his redefinition of the two concepts in the formula of *xin-li* 心-理 mind-Principle, which makes it necessary to see the meaning of *xin* 心 mind in the light of *li* 理 Principle, and vice versa. This innovative understanding requires the effort of probing the principles of things to be an essential part of the cultivation of mind; likewise to probe the principles of things entails the necessity of cultivating the mind, and in the process of investigating things the faculty of the mind is revealed and polished. Thus the cultivation of mind and the probing of Principle ought to be integrated; in other words, the internal and external dimensions of the Confucian practice must be fused into one. That is what Zhu Xi means by the orthodox learning practised by the ancient sages which is in contrast to the heretical doctrine of Buddhism.

Apart from looking at the theoretical construction of a system of thought, Zhu Xi also takes into account the practical significance of a doctrine, to be precise, the methodology contained in a doctrine. He almost takes it for granted that so far as a mature and comprehensive doctrine is concerned, it will have no adverse impact upon the person who puts this theory into practice. On the contrary, it will serve as a perfect navigation in practical terms, which will lead the practitioner to perfect him or herself. It follows that if a certain doctrine exerts some damaging impact upon individuals or society, this should be deemed an embodiment of the flaw within the doctrine itself. In other words, the shortcoming of an imperfect theory will be brought to light once it is applied to reality.

Once again Zhu Xi pushes Cheng Yi to the fore instead of directly proclaiming his own idea, he takes Cheng Yi's system as an example of this kind of perfect doctrinal

teaching, and claim it has overcome the imperfections embedded in Zen,<sup>264</sup> namely ‘*jingyue er liuyu kuangwang* 徑約而流於狂妄 *cling to simplicity and slip into arrogance and ignorance*’, without falling into the trap of the opposite, namely ‘*wubo er xianyu zhili* 務博而陷於支離 *focusing on erudition yet remaining stuck on fragmented opinions*’.<sup>265</sup> Therefore master Cheng’s thought is deemed the only system of thought that does not bring with it any detrimental effect. Unlike the two preceding forms, master Cheng has developed a new paradigm which, according to Zhu Xi, will liberate the mind of a learner from the aforementioned mistakes. In addition, Zhu Xi makes the point that master Cheng’s teaching envisages a perfect combination of the process of gradual accumulation with a sudden breakthrough, which allows one to go beyond the fragmented opinions of the specific parts and acquire an intuitive understanding of the whole picture.

By inserting the experience of a sudden breakthrough into the process of gradual accumulation, Zhu Xi once again affirms the orthodoxy of the kind of learning conducted by the Cheng-Zhu school and distinguishes it from learning for the sake of others. He clarifies this point in *Q&A* (No.50) where Zhu Xi intentionally differentiates what he means by being engaged in the investigation of things and extension of knowledge from the sheer pursuit of erudition.<sup>266</sup> It follows that the intellectual

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<sup>264</sup> Zhu Xi’s criticism of Zen does not cover the whole picture of Zen Buddhism in China, which is much more complicated than Zhu’s work suggests. Basically, Zhu Xi maintains a focus on the negative stance towards language that some Zen masters stress in their teaching. One remarkable exception to this view is the movement of ‘*wenzi chan* 文字禪 text Zen’, which occurred in the Song from the early 11<sup>th</sup> century to the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. This short-lived movement was followed by ‘*kanhua chan* 看話禪 meditation on a word or phrase’ and ‘*mozhaohan* 默照禪 meditation on silent illumination’; the former was established by Dahui Zonggao 大慧宗杲 (1089-1163) and the latter by Hongzhi Zhengjue 宏智正覺 (1091-1157). Zhu Xi’s sympathetic understanding of Zen Buddhism is probably derived from his engagement with the line of ‘*kanhua chan* 看話禪 meditation on a word or phrase’, and what he loathes most may allude to the influence of ‘*mozhaohan* 默照禪 meditation on silent illumination’. Although Zhu Xi has made sufficient room for a positive view of language both in its nature and in its effects, unfortunately we fail to find a documentary testimony to his acknowledgement of the historical significance of ‘*wenzi chan* 文字禪 text Zen’. For an in-depth analysis of ‘*wenzi chan* 文字禪 text Zen’, see Gong Jun 龔隽, *Chanshi Gouchen-yi Wenti wei Zhongxin de Sixiangshi Lunshu* 禪史勾沉-以問題為中心的思想史論述 *Theses on the History of Ch’an/Zen Buddhism-a Question-Focused Interpretation and Analysis of its Intellectual Fabric* (Beijing, 2006), 295-329.

<sup>265</sup> Zhu Xi, *DXHW* No. 49, *ZZQS*, 6,529-32.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.* No. 50: ‘曰、然則所謂格物致知之學、與世之所謂博物洽聞者奚以異。曰、此以反身窮理為主、而必究其本末是非之極摯。彼以徇外誇多為務、而不覈其表裏真妄之實然。必究其極。是以知愈博而心愈明。不覈其實。是以識愈多而心愈窒。此正為己為人之所以分、不可不察也。’ *ZZQS*, 6,532.

Question: However what is the difference between an erudite who is highly knowledgeable about things and current affairs and the one who is engaged in the so-called investigation of things and extension of knowledge?

Answer: One aims to reflect upon oneself and to exhaust the Principle, which entails the necessity of an inquiry into the root and the branches, the right and the wrong to the utmost. The other is exposing

operation of probing the principles of things should be classified as the genuine learning, namely learning for one's own sake. In that sense, the whole enterprise of *gewu zhizhi* 格物致知 the investigation of things and extension of knowledge is to be oriented towards enhancing the personal cultivation of the learner; thus learning leads to self-realisation.

To Zhu Xi this seemingly innovative conception of learning does not deviate from the Confucian tradition; on the contrary it is derived from the teaching of the sages and can be substantiated by it as quoted above in Question 47. To him the mutuality between *xiu xin* 修心 the cultivation of mind and *qiong li* 窮理 the probing of Principle has always been addressed by the ancient sages; he merely picks up this point and spells it out. He thus makes it clear that only by putting this methodology into practice will one be able to obtain a genuine knowledge as to the unity of *xin* 心 mind and *li* 理 Principle, the internal and the external. In that sense, the method that leads to a thorough understanding of the words of the ancient sages is of primary importance, because without following a proper method it is impossible to appropriate the meaning of scriptures, and without a personal appropriation the message of the ancient sages mediated by scriptures will remain a bare expression, an empty and abstract proposition of other people's idea, and will hardly exert an impact on one's life.

### **1.3.2.2 Implications of Zhu Xi's thought**

Based on the above analysis of Zhu Xi's work on *Da Xue* 大學 The Great Learning, we now come to the point of having an overall view of Zhu Xi's intellectual heritage. For that purpose we will only focus on the peculiarity of his philosophy and see what implications can be drawn from it. On this regard two relevant issues come to the fore: the dialectical mode of thinking and expressing as presented in *Q&A*, and the crucial importance that Zhu Xi particularly attaches to his methodology. Put it simply, the dialectical way of thinking enables Zhu Xi to integrate both *li* 理 Principle and *xin* 心 mind in one system and even make them to be interdependent, in that sense Zhu Xi

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himself to the external things and is occupied in boasting about his eruditeness, thus overlooks the effort in checking the authenticity of things he has learned, be it concerning the internal or the external, the truth or the illusion. If one takes it as necessary to carry out the investigation to the utmost, it will be the case that the more knowledge he obtains, the more illuminated his mind will become. If one fails to check the authenticity of what he has learned, he will be in the situation that the more he knows, the more narrow-minded he becomes. That is the distinction between the learning for one's own sake and the learning for the sake of others, which one ought to be fully aware of.

refuses to speak of *li* 理 Principle as an entity of mind-free, nor does he find it appropriate to speak of *xin* 心 mind as being totally devoid of things.<sup>267</sup> Owing to the significant role that Zhu Xi allows for his methodology the concepts of *li* 理 Principle and *xin* 心 mind are then to be embedded in a more fundamental quest for the orthodox Confucian way of scriptural learning and self-cultivation, as thus formulated typically in his *Bu Zhuan* 補傳 Supplement, hence philosophical speculation serves practical purposes, and becomes an integral part of his methodology after all.

To disclose the typical mode of thinking and expressing of the Song literati as a whole, we need first to look at the basic vocabulary they share in their debate and discussion. The work of Zhu Xi, the most versatile writer of the time, provides us with an exemplar of the glossary pertaining to the scholarship of the Song masters. In *Q&A* this glossary is intensively unfolded, especially in Question 49 when Zhu Xi highlights the specific defective points in each of the prominent disciples of master Cheng. The glossary employed by Zhu Xi in formulating his critical comments suggests a kind of symmetry and balance, which is basic to the structure of the philosophical debate. In the context of the Neo-Confucianism of the Song the striving for such a symmetrical structure seems to be highly regarded. Zhu Xi's reasoning on this account could possibly make sense even to those of his counterparts who fundamentally disagree with him over the methodology of scriptural learning and personal cultivation.

A glance at the following glossary may help to illustrate the structure of Zhu Xi's argument.

<i>yi</i> 一 one	<i>duo</i> 多 many
<i>tong</i> 同 similarity	<i>yi</i> 異 difference
<i>nei</i> 內 internal	<i>wai</i> 外 external
<i>ji</i> 己 self	<i>wu</i> 物 things
<i>jing</i> 精 refined	<i>cu</i> 粗 crude
<i>ben</i> 本 essential	<i>mo</i> 末 incidental
<i>yue</i> 約 simplicity	<i>bo</i> 博 complexity
<i>chijing</i> 持敬 holding fast to conscientiousness	<i>guanli</i> 觀理 observing the principles

<sup>267</sup> Zhu Xi, *DXHW* No. 47: '人之所以爲學、心與理而已矣。心雖主乎一身、而其體之虛靈足以管乎天下之理。理雖散在萬物、而其用之微妙實不外乎一人之心、初不可以內外精粗而論也。' *ZZQS*, 6,528.

<i>zhizhi</i> 致知 the extension of knowledge	<i>gewu</i> 格物 the investigation of things
<i>Zhizhi</i> 知至 the state when knowledge has been extended	<i>wuge</i> 物格 the state when things have been investigated
<i>guantong</i> 貫通 thorough comprehension	<i>jilei</i> 積累 gradual accumulation

The glossary listed above gives a sketch of Zhu Xi's argument. With the aid of an intellectual grasp of the dialectical relation between each pair of the concepts as illustrated in the two columns, Zhu Xi presents an in-depth analysis of master Cheng's revolutionary interpretation of *gewu* 格物 the investigation of things as *qiongli* 窮理 probing the Principle. In the course of refuting and criticising the widespread views of some eminent scholars who have enjoyed a high level of authority and publicity, Zhu Xi sharpens the respective questions and pinpoints some of those subtle and implicit fallacies which are not easily to be discerned.

For instance, when referring to Lü Lantian,<sup>268</sup> one of the most renowned disciples of Cheng Yi, Zhu Xi points out that Lü has failed to comprehend what master Cheng means by *qiongli* 窮理 probing of the Principle, as he mistakenly refers *li* 理 Principle to the external things; thus his understanding overlooks another dimension of this concept which lies in oneself, or put another way, in the person who carries out the conduct of *qiongli* 窮理 probing the Principle. He sums up the problem of Lü's theory as follows:

Here when the necessity of probing the principles of the ten thousand things is stressed, it exclusively refers to the external things, thus the intrinsic principle lying in oneself is not being illuminated. It merely focuses on the analogical similarities of the multitude of things, yet fails to examine the distinctive nature and attribute of each individual thing, thus the delicacy and subtlety of the Principle is to be somehow neglected. It wants no difference yet cannot be free from the differences within the four theories<sup>269</sup>; intends to drive all into similarity yet fails to attain the oneness of the same origin. Hence it is simply a futile attempt to forge farfetched interpretation without glimpsing the beauty of

<sup>268</sup> For a brief introduction to Lü's teaching, see 'Lü Fan Zhu Ru Xue An 呂范諸儒學案 Anthology of Lü Fan and Other Confucian Masters', in Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 and Quan Zuwang 全祖望 (eds.), *Song-Yuan Xue An* 宋元學案 *Anthology of Song-Yuan Confucianism* (1986), 2, 1105-13, *Juan* 31.

<sup>269</sup> These probably refer to the thoughts developed by the four renowned disciples of the Cheng brothers, among whom Lü is the last; the other three are Xie Shangcai 謝上蔡, You Cu 遊酢, and Yang Shi 楊時.

a thorough understanding of all. What do you think of it in comparison with master Cheng's teaching?<sup>270</sup>

As *li* 理 Principle pertains both to the external (*wu* 物 things) and to the internal (*ji* 己 self), the manifestation of *li* 理 Principle ranges from the crudest to the most refined. So *li* 理 Principle stands for the same one source from which all things originate. If one embarks upon the philosophical quest for the similarities between the multitudes, this quest should never cease until it reaches the ultimate, undifferentiated one. In this respect, Lü clearly falls short of Zhu Xi's expectations. On the other hand, Zhu Xi makes it clear that the pursuit of the state of oneness cannot take place without a thorough inquiry into the distinction of individual things; without knowing the difference and distinction, an expression of the oneness barely holds truth. This is another area in which Lü exhibits a profound deficiency in assimilating his master's idea.

In the same manner, Zhu Xi scrutinises the various systems developed by master Cheng's disciples as regards Cheng's innovative interpretation of *gewu* 格物 the investigation of things. Through logical inference Zhu Xi draws our attention to the subtle distance between a master and a disciple. In each case Zhu Xi manages to put his finger on the exact cause of the deviation. Although each of the disciples deviates from the original thinking of master Cheng at a specific point, they all miss the subtle balance, or the invisible symmetry, that exists in the structure of master Cheng's system. The key to that perfect balance lies only in the ability of dialectical thinking, which cannot be easily passed on from a master to a disciple. On the contrary, it must stem from the self-realisation occurring within the innermost depth of each individual's mind.

It follows that the thought of a person is the very embodiment of his level of consciousness, or to put it in Confucian terms, the extent to which he has realised his innate heavenly nature. Conforming to this typical mentality of the Song Confucian learners, it is justified to deem the deficiency of a system of thought an indication of the author's immaturity in self-realisation. When Zhu Xi applies this rule to each of master Cheng's disciples, it becomes clear that none of them is capable of receiving the system of master Cheng's thought in its entirety. In so doing, Zhu Xi unveils the simple fact that master Cheng's idea has far exceeded what his disciples' minds can possibly

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<sup>270</sup> Zhu Xi, *DXHW* No. 49: '然其欲必窮萬物之理而專指外物、則於理之在己者有不明矣。但求衆物比類之同、而不究一物性情之異、則於理之精微者有不察矣。不欲其異而不免乎四說之異、必欲其同而未極乎一原之同、則徒有牽合之勞、而不睹貫通之妙矣。其於程子之說何如哉。' *ZZQS*, 6,528.

allow for. Thus the ingenious solution offered by master Cheng is inevitably reduced and diluted in the hands of his disciples.

To complete the task of understanding a great master like Cheng Yi, one must first prepare oneself to do so. In other words, one needs to possess the ability of discernment in order to appreciate his idea. But on the other hand, the ability to appreciate a work of art or to understand an idea cannot be developed without the act of understanding. Thus the inner capacity is to be nourished and expanded through applying it to the external objects, and clearly it will not grow on the basis of separating itself from the outside world.

On that account, *gewu* 格物 the investigation of things acquires a twofold significance: in the process of questing for the principle of a thing, the inner capacity of the person who performs the quest is evolving. The two dimensions form a circle that drives one to ceaselessly deepen and broaden one's understanding of the world and oneself. It is this dialectical relation between the external and internal dimensions involved in *gewu* 格物 the investigation of things that constitutes the core of the methodology of the Cheng-Zhu school.

Focusing on an innovative interpretation of *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning*, in particular of the key phrase '*gewu* 格物 the investigation of thing', a new methodology comes into fashion within the circle of the Cheng-Zhu school. The central theme of this methodology is defined by both Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi as the way of *qiongli* 窮理 probing the Principle, which in the context of Cheng-Zhu means that the entire enterprise of scriptural learning and personal cultivation is aimed at acquiring a genuine knowledge of *li* 理 Principle. Thus the role of the concept of *li* 理 Principle is twofold: as a premise before one embarks upon the investigation of things and as an end after things are investigated. Philosophically speaking *li* 理 Principle constitutes an ontological ground for the operation of *qiongli* 窮理 probing the Principle; and the operation of *qiongli* 窮理 probing the Principle in turn enriches the ontological ground from which it originates.

Thus arises the question: how does the principle of a particular thing relate to the one Principle that embraces all? The answer consists in the doctrine of *li yi fen shu* 理一分殊 one Principle with diverse manifestations. The relation of one to many had long been discussed by the two Chinese Buddhist schools, Hua Yan and Zen.<sup>271</sup> The Confucian

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<sup>271</sup> In his early years Zhu Xi had learned Buddhism and was once fascinated by Zen, as seen in ZZYL, Juan 104. For a detailed exploration of this issue, see Chen Lai 陈来, *Zhuzi Zhexue Yanjiu* 朱子哲学研究 *A Study of Zhu Xi's Philosophy* (2008), 28-35.

version of the question is seen first in Cheng Yi, who puts forward the proposition of *li yi fen shu* 理一分殊 one Principle with diverse manifestations when discussing Zhang Zai's *Ximing* 西銘 *The West Script* with his disciple Yang Shi.<sup>272</sup> Evidently this philosophical question had captivated Zhu Xi, and seemed to have taken him years to think it through. Like Yangshi, Zhu Xi also brought this knotty question to his tutor Li Tong. In his short response, Li makes it clear that no Confucian learner can afford neglecting the diverse manifestations of *li* 理 Principle.<sup>273</sup> Thinking in the same line, Zhu Xi maintains that 'all things are endowed with this *li* 理 Principle, and all the principles share one origin. Because each principle takes a distinctive status, thus each fulfils a different function.'<sup>274</sup> The doctrine of *gewu* 格物 the investigation of things clearly gives priority to the pursuit of the diverse manifestations of the one *li* 理 Principle, instead of questing for the one *li* 理 Principle directly.

Throughout his long intellectual career Zhu Xi does not seem to have concerned himself with a system of ontological inquiry around the concept of *li* 理 Principle; his focus is rather on formulating a new methodology through which the ontological truth will naturally be brought to light.

The reason for his privileging a reform in methodology is worth pondering. Instead of deducing a system of ontology from the concept of *li* 理 Principle, Zhu Xi has developed a systematic methodology that leads to the apprehension of *li* 理 Principle. This is because, being bound together with the effort of *gewu* 格物 the investigation of things, the concept of *li* 理 Principle in Zhu Xi's system will by no means indicate an abstract reality whose autonomous and absolute objectivity is beyond the realm of human understanding; on the contrary, the subjective condition of an intelligent being should always be taken into account as far as the truthful nature of *li* 理 Principle is concerned. In this way the methodology acquires a new significance in the sense that it becomes the very means to reveal the ontological meaning of *li* 理 Principle. Once the ontological meaning of *li* 理 Principle is realised in the Confucian text, this realisation will constitute an ontological foundation for the Confucian values and conventions. In providing classical Confucianism with an ontological basis, the master mind of the Neo-

<sup>272</sup> Cheng yi, 'Henan Chengshi Wenji 河南程氏文集 Literary Work of the Two Cheng Masters', *Juan 9, Er Cheng Ji* 二程集 *Works of the Two Chengs* (1981), 2,609.

<sup>273</sup> Zhu Xi, 'Yanping Li Xiansheng Shidizi Dawen 延平李先生师弟子答问 Master Li Yanping's Answers to the Questions of the Disciples', *ZZQS*, 13,335-6.

<sup>274</sup> Zhu Xi, *ZZYL*, *Juan 18*: '萬物皆有此理，理皆 同出一原。但所居之位不同，則其理之用不一。備錄' *ZZQS*, 14,606.



Confucian movement in the Song has accomplished the reconstruction project initiated by his predecessor.

At the end of this chapter, we try to rephrase Zhu Xi's philosophical idea in a language with which we may feel more at home.

By the words '*gewu* 格物 the investigation of things' Zhu Xi means the quest for the principles of particular things through an orderly, systematised, universally applicable procedure in a concrete personal life. He thereby assigns mankind the task of ascertaining truth by the virtue of the human intellect. Here truth does not refer to an abstract concept which is prior to the existence of the concrete things, and it by no means intermingles with them; nor does it imply a set of universals conjured up in the mind. To Zhu Xi truth is but *li* 理 Principle that runs through all, without discrimination, and the same *li* 理 Principle is to be manifested through the principle of every single particular thing, which is of intrinsic value and bears its own distinctive character.

On that account, the quest for truth is the quest for *li* 理 Principle; the quest for the *li* 理 Principle must commence with the investigation of the particular things; and each particular thing has a distinctive existence whose principle awaits investigation stemming from its own merit.

Although Zhu Xi's doctrine is not grounded entirely on the subject-object dichotomy, for the sake of convenience we temporarily adopt the terms subject and object in order to paraphrase his thought in philosophical terms that are familiar to us. Generally speaking, the one who conducts the investigation is the subject and the thing that is investigated is the object. Presumably the distinction between subject and object is prerequisite to an operation whose objective is the intrinsic principle of a particular thing, which can only be grasped intellectually. The subject, in this case, seems to be reduced to a pure intellectual power which thrusts the principle of a thing out of its preceding dormant state and brings it to light. In the process of the principle in the object proceeding from an implicit substance to an explicit expression, the intellective power in the subject is also evolving from potentiality to reality. The object is influenced by the subject in the sense of being illuminated by the intellective light of the subject, while the subject is affected by the object to exactly the same extent, in the sense of exerting its intellective power in proportion to the complexity of the object. In other words, the subject opens itself up to the object just as much as the object is illuminated by the light of the subject. Thus the subject and the object, in the act of

knowing, are integrated into one; likewise the external is no longer alienated from the internal, and the self is not segregated from the things, irrespective of the distinction between one and another.

When the things are thus investigated, the knowledge that embraces unity of the external and the internal will then be obtained. This is knowledge in the real sense, which is nothing like a gift granted by the divine but rather the fruit derived from a long-term accumulation of man's persistent intellectual operation. Therefore the acquisition of knowledge entails a process of gradual accumulation and a sudden breakthrough which serves as an end.

Hence the idea of gradual accumulation implies not only a quantitative increase, but more importantly a qualitative leap which puts a halt to the succession. Undoubtedly there are gradations consisting in the development of knowledge, which commences from a general proposition concerning the unity of the external and the internal, through the differentiated phases that give rise to the distinctive expressions of the particulars, and finally culminates in a genuine understanding of the unity of all.

Therefore the appropriation of a genuine knowledge as to the unity of the external and the internal embraces a conclusive result as well as the process through which this result is accomplished. Thus both the end and the means should be taken into account. A bare expression of the end does not make sense without a full exposition of the means; once the importance of the means comes to the fore, the requirement will arise for clarity and definition in thinking and expressing.

To summarise, an internal realisation that does not integrate within itself the content of the external is no more than a bare esoteric doctrine, which will by no means be perfect and complete unless transformed into an exoteric one through an intellectual approach.

## Chapter 2 The Notion of the Human Intellect and Intellectualism as Presented in Eckhart's Hermeneutical Framework

### Introduction

The notion of the human intellect lies at the heart of Eckhart's philosophical and theological thought. His innovative and thorough exposition of this concept demonstrates a new way of thinking and expressing in the medieval scholastic tradition, which never fails to stimulate his reader and audience. As will be shown in more detail, to Eckhart the human intellect serves as the juncture of the two contrary spheres: the intellectual and the corporeal. Cosmologically speaking, it sits at the bottom of the intellectual domain, while also standing at the top of the corporeal world. The role of the human intellect, therefore, is twofold. On the one hand, it is open to and has power over the senses and desires, which are inferior to the intellect; on the other hand, it gazes upon the pure intellectual world, which is superior to man's intellect. The former pertains to the intellective operations such as discursive reasoning and conceptualising, which are based on the data that the senses have collected in dealing with the particular things in the world. In its opening to the external world the human intellect exercises its faculty at the level of human cognition; in that sense, intellective operation is equivalent to cognitive conduct and the human intellect is another word for human reason. However, the ability to reason is far from exhausting the power of the human intellect. When it comes to the relation to its superior, namely the pure intellectual or the divine sphere, intellect has to exceed rationality and functions purely as a passive recipient.

Clearly Eckhart allows human reasoning to be enclosed in man's intellective operation, but reasoning is not the major function of the intellect.<sup>275</sup> The main role of man's intellect, according to Eckhart, lies in its potentiality for a perfect reception of the divine, in the sense that its incorporeality and formlessness allows all the ideas conceived in the divine mind to be received by the human mind in an undistorted

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<sup>275</sup> Boethius makes a distinction between reason and intellect (*Consolation of Philosophy*, iv, 6). He regards intellect as the power that is proper to eternity and reason as proper to time. 'Philosophy explains that God's divine intelligence can view all things from its eternal mind, while human reason can only see them from a temporal point of view.' Thomas refutes such a distinction in *Summa Theol.* I, q.79, a.8 and explains in a.10 that 'Boethius takes intelligence as meaning that act of the intellect which transcends the act of the reason. Wherefore he also says that reason alone belongs to the human race, as intelligence alone belongs to God, for it belongs to God to understand all things without any investigation.' Eckhart's stance seems to be closer to that of Boethius.

manner. In receiving the ideas conceived in the divine mind, the human intellect has grasped the being (*esse*) of the things in the world, as the idea in the divine is the being (*esse*) of the particular thing. In other words, the existence of this or that thing is always held in the divine. Eckhart does take account of Aristotelian empiricism, but shows no intention to depict man's intellective operation on an empirical platform.<sup>276</sup>

It is very clear that Eckhart focuses his attention on the receptive manner of man's intellective faculty, which distinguishes his thought from that of Thomas Aquinas, who depicts man's intellect mainly as an active agent.<sup>277</sup>

As the human intellect is able to function at different levels and thus can be described in different terms, the approach to this issue spans from philosophy to theology in a broader sense that encompasses issues concerning cosmology, epistemology, ontology, psychology and spirituality. Despite the complexity of this topic, Eckhart's inquiry into the human intellect centres on its relation to the divine. That allows him to graft his philosophical thinking onto the Christian theological tradition. His expounding of the human intellect gives rise to a type of intellectualism that is interwoven with theological and spiritual matters, as the receptive stance of the intellect shares common ground with the detached mind, and the perfect reception achieved by the intellect illustrates what Eckhart means by detachment. Eckhart believes that it is only on the ground of a detached mind that the Word will speak afresh and the Son be born anew. Hence the power of the human intellect runs deep into the spiritual world and fundamentally defines the meaning of spiritual practice.

Eckhart allows himself to wrestle with the same idea persistently throughout his academic career. In that sense, it is justified to regard him as a systematic thinker.<sup>278</sup> However, he does not attempt to formulate his personal thought in the form of systematic discourse as a modern philosopher or theologian would normally do, nor

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<sup>276</sup> Thomas, *Summa Theol.*, I, q.84, a.7. Thomas explains why, in us, the act of intellect is not separated from phantasm. 'In the present state of life in which the soul is united to a passible body, it is impossible for our intellect to understand anything actually, except by turning to the phantasms.'

<sup>277</sup> Thomas expounds his view of the human intellect in detail in *Summa Theol.*, I, q. 79. This question contains 13 articles; in article 3 Thomas argues: 'On the contrary, The Philosopher says (*De Anima* iii, 5), that "it is necessary for these differences", namely, the passive and active intellect, "to be in the soul". The same argumentation appears in q.54, a.4 where Thomas reasserts the necessity for the distinction of the passive and active intellect in us.

<sup>278</sup> For example, Bernard McGinn highlights this aspect when he discusses Eckhart's doctrine of God and its relation to Neoplatonism. McGinn writes: 'Along with John the Scot and Nicholas of Cusa, Eckhart is arguably the most systematic of the Latin Neoplatonic dialecticians, and he is the one who suffered the most for it.' See Bernard McGinn, 'Meister Eckhart on God as Absolute Unity', in Dominic J. O'Meara (ed.), *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought*, Studies in Neoplatonism 3 (Albany, 1982), 129.

does he complete a comprehensive systematic *Summa* as we find it in Thomas Aquinas for example, or even in the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard. He assigns himself a rather different task, which is to untie the most intriguing theoretical knots that continued to puzzle the most capable theologians of his day. His solution is fundamentally a systematic if not a circular one, which combines questions and commentaries with the propositions that serve as the hermeneutical key<sup>279</sup> to any explanation of questions and any reading of scripture, while he adds that for him the propositions and questions ‘will be found to be clearly confirmed by the truth and authority of sacred scripture itself or some of the saints and illustrious masters’.<sup>280</sup> This not only shows the inter-relation between his intellectual and hermeneutical approach, but also demonstrates that rational arguments of the propositions serve as the basis for solving problems and unravelling scriptural sense, while at the same time scripture and the learned tradition confirm what he has assumed in his propositions. The wording itself (basis–confirmation) indicates, however, that at least hermeneutically, Eckhart starts with the propositions. So, despite his methodological circularity, understanding in Eckhart has a clear direction from rationality to the reading of scripture and tradition. His personal thoughts are, therefore, both argumentative and unfolded entirely through a dialogue with the scriptural texts, of both the Old and New Testaments, and with intellectual masters of the philosophical and theological tradition. It is a process in which he poses his own intellectual questions first, and then brings them together with scripture and tradition, while at the same time he is pressed by questions arising from scripture itself and from the present and past masters and students. Clearly his thought is proceeding through a dialogue, not a monologue, and yet already the directed process of his hermeneutics shows that his own intellectual questioning forms the start of understanding.

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<sup>279</sup> Eckhart, *Prologus generalis in Opus Tripartitum* n.11 (LW I 1, 156,4-7): ‘Tertio et ultimo est praenotandum quod opus secundum, similiter et tertium sic dependet a primo opere, scilicet propositionum, quod sine ipso sunt parvae utilitatis, eo quod quaestionum declarationes et auctoritatum expositiones plerumque fundantur supra aliquam propositionum.’

‘Finally, it should be noted beforehand that the second Book, and so too the third, are so dependent on the first, namely the Book of Propositions, that without it they are of little use, because the explanations of questions and the commentaries on [Scriptural] texts are usually based on one of the propositions.’ (Trans. Armand A. Maurer in *Meister Eckhart: Parisian Questions and Prologues*, Toronto, 1974, 85; abridged as *Parisian Questions and Prologues* in the following footnotes.)

<sup>280</sup> Eckhart, *Prologus generalis in Opus Tripartitum*, n.7 (LW I 1, 152,3-7): ‘Advertendum autem est quod nonnulla in sequentibus propositionibus, quaestionibus et expositionibus primo aspectu monstruosa, dubia aut falsa apparebunt, secus autem si sollerter et studiosius pertractentur. Luculenter enim inveniatur dictis attestari veritas et auctoritas ipsius sacri canonis seu alicuius sanctorum aut doctorum famosorum.’ (Trans. Armand A. Maurer in *Parisian Questions and Prologues*, 1974, 82.)

Eckhart's dialogue with the sacred texts takes various literary forms, mainly *quaestiones*, commentaries and homilies. These three constitute a hermeneutical framework within which Eckhart's innovative or even provocative ideas are backed up by the scriptural text, and sometimes reinforced by further logical inference based on syllogisms. It seems to be a norm in the medieval scholastic context that one's personal thought ought to be justified by the sacred scripture and further reinforced by the teachings of the saints and past masters.<sup>281</sup> With the overwhelmingly abundant philosophical influx from the Arabic world,<sup>282</sup> Aristotle and Neoplatonic writers become further sources of authority and inspiration. When the philosophical resources are at a Christian scholar's disposal, his dialogue with the scripture will be refreshed. As a result, an original interpretation of scripture will emerge, in which Aristotelian and Neoplatonic ideas and Christian doctrines are fused. Eckhart's scriptural commentaries and questions are written mainly in the typical scholastic Latin (Aristotelian and Neoplatonic vocabularies), and his homilies are delivered in both Latin and Middle High German.

It is worth noting that as a scholastic theologian, Eckhart considers it an obligation to enrich the Christian faith with the newly discovered philosophical sources. This means that obscurity arising from the scriptural texts should be clarified, controversial and contradictory interpretations given by the previous masters should be questioned and discussed, and the Christian doctrines ought not to be treated as esoteric revelation, but demonstrated as verifiable truth. Despite the innovative feature of his thinking, it will do little justice to Eckhart if we take him as one who intends a free demonstration of his personal thought. What he attempts in his own scriptural interpretation is to present a sophisticated philosophical/theological dialogue with the sacred text and with previous masters' commentaries, as well as with the exotic philosophy beyond Christian tradition.

Taking both the thought and the expression into account, this chapter will proceed in the order of the three genres, *quaestio*, commentary and homily, to explore Eckhart's way of understanding the human intellect in relation to his hermeneutics.

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<sup>281</sup> See Markus Vinzent, *Meister Eckhart, On the Lord's Prayer* (Leuven, 2012), 81-97.

<sup>282</sup> See Kurt Flasch, *Meister Eckhart: die Geburt der 'Deutschen Mystik' aus dem Geist der arabischen Philosophie* (*The Birth of the 'German Mysticism' in the Spirit of Arabic Philosophy*) (München, 2006).

## 2.1 Eckhart the Philosopher: Prioritising the Intellect through *Quaestiones*

Following the medieval scholastic tradition, Eckhart presents his thinking in the form of *quaestiones*. While others may have been lost, we have access to the few that have been preserved: his *Parisian Questions* (five published by Martin Grabmann and translated into English by Armand A. Maurer, four rediscovered and translated by Markus Vinzent, and one newly re-discovered by Professor Senner).<sup>283</sup> In this series of *Disputed Questions*, Eckhart explicitly gives priority to intellect and knowing – the act of intellect. We will first look at the structure and function of a *quaestio* as a literary form in the context of medieval scholastic theology, and then explore Eckhart's thought with regard to intellect.

### 2.1.1 *Quaestiones* as the Trademark of Scholasticism

From the hermeneutical point of view, the form of a *quaestio* – although itself an older literary genre (especially in the form of *Questions and Answers* literature) – marked a new approach to theology and became the typical expression of speculative theology at the culmination of the scholastic movement.<sup>284</sup> Despite the fact that theological questioning was intensively philosophised, the scholastic *quaestiones* were nevertheless closely tied up with scriptural learning of the day, in the sense that those *quaestiones* proposed by the masters of theology at the University of Paris were also derived from their long-term wrestling with the scriptural texts.

Thus the *quaestio*, already known in patristic times,<sup>285</sup> had come to the fore as one of the literary forms in which scholarship developed topics across the disciplines. It had become embedded in the longstanding scholarly tradition of Christian theology, the basis and foundation of which has always been the Holy Scripture upon which theological speculations have been built. Historically speaking, the form of the *quaestio*

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<sup>283</sup> For details, see Markus Vinzent, 'Questions on the Attributes (of God): Four Rediscovered Parisian Questions of Meister Eckhart', *The Journal of Theological Studies* 63 (April 2012), 156-86.

<sup>284</sup> Jacqueline Hamesse's study offers a comprehensive account of *quaestiones quodlibetales*, which covers the origins, the characteristics, and the evolution and demise of the genre. For details, see Jacqueline Hamesse, 'Theological Quaestiones Quodlibetales', in: Christopher Schabel (ed.), *Theological Quodlibeta in the Middle Ages: The Thirteenth Century* (Leiden and Boston, 2006), 17-48.

<sup>285</sup> For instance, with Philo of Alexandria, the question and answer genre is turned to the exegesis of the Bible. He composed two works of this kind: *Questions and Answers on Genesis* and *Questions and Answers on Exodus*. Following his example, Christian expositors of the Bible, both orthodox and heretical, produced similar works. There are for example *The Antitheses* of Marcion, *The Syllogisms* of Apelles, *Gospel Questions and Solutions* of Eusebius of Caesarea, *Questions on the Old and New Testament* of Ambrosiaster, *Questions on the Hebrew Text of Genesis* of St. Jerome, and *Eighty-three Different Questions* of St. Augustine.

was in direct liaison with the new method of teaching that thrived at the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century in the recently established faculty of theology. The emergence of the university (*universitas*) brought about this new method, namely disputations, in addition to the traditional method of the lecture, which should be understood in its etymological meaning of ‘reading’.<sup>286</sup> Following the traditional way, a master of theology was expected literally to ‘read’ some prescribed texts before the students and then to give appropriate explanations. The theological training at the time was largely defined by the systematic approach demonstrated by Peter Lombard in his compilation of the *Four Books of Sentences*, which served for centuries as the textbook for the students in the faculty of theology. The originality of Lombard was mainly expressed through the orderly division and structure of the *Sentences*, in which the patristic doctrines are arranged into a coherent system. Overall Lombard’s *Sentences* provided the framework for the forthcoming theological and philosophical discussions, to be precise, disputations.

The disputations can be divided into two types, according to the way they were performed. If a question was set up by the master himself and was thoroughly discussed in the class between the master and his students, the solution would result in a *disputed question* if written by the master himself, or the *report* of a disputed question if noted down by someone else. But the academic disputations were not necessarily confined to the classroom; they could also be performed in public. In the case of a public dispute anybody could submit a question on any subject, hence the name ‘*quodlibetal question*’.

The method of disputation pushed the activity of questioning to the very centre of theological study, and the *quaestio* became the genre proper to speculative theology. The *quaestio* structure, according to the observation made by William J. Courtenay, provided the means for pursuing intellectual interests through the theological problems posed by Lombard.<sup>287</sup> The sophisticated treatment of the doctrinal controversy by a scholastic theologian is often preserved in his *Quaestiones Disputatae*, as typically seen in Thomas.<sup>288</sup> When a thesis concerning a controversial Christian doctrine was proposed in the form of a disputed question, theological study was inevitably

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<sup>286</sup> Etienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (London, 1955), 246.

<sup>287</sup> William J. Courtenay, ‘The Bible in the Fourteenth Century: Some Observations’, *Church History* 54 (1985) 176-87.

<sup>288</sup> Thomas composed a series of *Quaestiones Disputatae* including *De spiritualibus creaturis*, *De Unione Verbi Incarnati*, *De veritate*, *De potentia*, *De anima*, *De malo*, *De virtutibus* and *Quodlibetales*.



philosophised to a certain degree, or at least logically structured according to reason. In the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century – the golden age of scholasticism, which saw a systematic and comprehensive introduction of Aristotle’s work into the Latin world<sup>289</sup> – a noteworthy Neoplatonic element was also included in the Aristotelian influx.<sup>290</sup> A belief developed that faith which was proclaimed in the church could and should be verified by natural reason. The call for a philosophical elucidation of Christian doctrine became louder than ever within Christendom, and this gave rise to a hybrid of philosophy and theology in the sense that a theological topic was heatedly debated in philosophical terms. The philosophising form of theology was often expressed through the structure of *quaestio*.<sup>291</sup>

In the context of the medieval scholastic movement, the *quaestio* was widely adopted and became the favourite literary form of speculative theology. To a scholastic theologian, the *quaestio* offers a method to fulfil a fervent passion for knowledge and an aspiration for a rationalised expression of Christian faith. Furthermore, leaving aside the theological content of the disputed questions formulated in the Middle Ages, the ‘question’ form itself deserves particular attention, as it holds the power to trigger original thinking, and in general lends itself to genuine thinking. It is impossible to rise above the conventional mode of thinking without the activity of questioning, while questioning often pushes the speaker to go beyond repetition of the old masters. From Gadamer’s point of view,<sup>292</sup> in its openness to multiple solutions the question reveals a unique logical form. Whenever a question is asked, it automatically entails the kind of

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<sup>289</sup> According to the study of B.B. Price, from the early thirteenth century about 55 different books attributed to Aristotle were available for study in the Latin West. The logical works of Aristotle were circulated as the core of the ‘New Logic’ corpus. Aristotle’s works provided a collection of texts irresistible to the medieval university, such that their incorporation would permanently alter the scope of education. See B.B. Price, *Medieval Thought: an introduction* (Oxford and Cambridge MA, 1992), 80-3. Price also gives a list of these books (80-1), quoted from Bernard G. Dod, ‘Aristoteles latinus’, in Norman Kretzmann (ed.), *Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy: From the Rediscovery of Aristotle to the Disintegration of Scholasticism 1100-1600*, (Cambridge, 1982), 51.

<sup>290</sup> David Knowles points out that a certain number of non-Aristotelian writings passed into Arabic under the name of the Philosopher. Among them, two have great influence: *Theologia Aristotelis*, made up of passages from Books IV-VI of the *Enneads* of Plotinus, and *Liber de Causis* by Proclus. See *The Evolution of Medieval Thought* (London, 1963), 194.

<sup>291</sup> For details concerning the structure of the scholastic *quaestio*, see Pal émon Glorieux, *La littérature quodlib étique de 1260 à 1320*, Bibliothèque thomiste 5 (Paris, 1925), 11-58.

<sup>292</sup> Gadamer offers some insights into the structure of question in general which helps us to understand why the scholastic theologians in the Middle Ages were almost unanimously in favour of the form of *quaestio*. That is the only reason why Gadamer is particularly mentioned here; I have no intention to develop a parallel between Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics and a medieval theologian’s philosophical exegesis of biblical texts.

negativity whose fulfilment is to be found ‘in a radical negativity: the knowledge of not knowing’.<sup>293</sup> If a question is asked properly, the questioner himself must have already realised what he does not know; in other words, his raising of a question is conditioned by his awareness of his ignorance on a specific point. A typical illustration of this is seen in Plato’s account of the Socratic dialogue, the proceedings of which are explicitly dominated by the role of the questioner, Socrates. Through the case of Socrates, it becomes clear that asking a genuine question is far more difficult than finding an answer to it.<sup>294</sup> In that sense, questioning is equivalent to thinking.

Therefore, the question holds priority over the answer, even if some elements of the answer are always embedded in the question. The question is able to loosen one’s attachment to the conventional way of thinking and to preconceived opinions, and in the meantime points to a new direction where the answer ought to be found. Hence, the question implies both openness and limitation; to borrow Gadamer’s term, when a question is asked, the ‘horizon’ of the question is also defined. The question certainly opens up new directions, but this openness is not boundless; it indicates a horizon that is specifically proper to this question. A question that indicates no direction is a distorted one, as it leads nowhere.<sup>295</sup>

A genuine question specifies a direction for further investigation and also defines a horizon in which the answer is expected to be found. It signifies a departure from the old system and also drops some hints as to the new solutions. Therefore, to question does not mean to break away from what has been conventionally accepted in a blind and radical manner, but to grow out of the existent framework and look for further development. A genuine question shows a link with the old and also entails an openness to the new.

The question also possesses a profound affinity with knowledge, because the logical structure of a question entails both negative and positive judgements. This, Gadamer believes, is the basis of the essential relation between question and knowledge. ‘For it is the essence of knowledge not only to judge something correctly, but at the same time and for the same reason to exclude what is wrong.’<sup>296</sup> Knowledge of something is not to be achieved exclusively by affirmation; it must go through the process of refuting

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<sup>293</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. and ed. by Garrett Barden and John Cumming, (London, 1975), 325.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.* 326.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.* 327.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.* 328.

the counter-instance and revealing the incorrectness of the counter-argument. Question and knowledge share the same logical structure, the openness to both the negative and the positive. For that reason, the question cannot be separated from the acquisition of knowledge. In general the question serves to deepen and broaden knowledge; a question that makes no contribution to further knowledge cannot be deemed a genuine one. The activity of asking questions should be driven by the aspiration for knowledge. It is hard to believe that one who has no desire for knowledge is able to ask good questions. The ability to question something that has never been questioned belongs to an original mind; indeed, questioning constitutes the essential part of creative thinking.

The universal structure of the ‘question’ can be embodied in various ways according to the specific context. In the medieval scholastic context, it acquired the form of *quaestio*. As a literary form peculiar to scholasticism, the *quaestio* remained, until the end of the medieval period, the favourite mode of exposition of personal thought for the masters of the university. Etienne Gilson points out that the *quaestio* was the living cell of school teaching.<sup>297</sup> It was chosen for two reasons: it served to encapsulate the originality of a master’s personal thought; and it was employed as a teaching method in the classroom, for the purpose of stimulating the students. The form of *quaestio* explicitly diverted attention to the process through which a negative or positive answer is substantiated, so the validity of an answer lies entirely in the quality of its justification; it does not matter whether the answer one gives is negative or positive; rather, the depth of the thought and the technique of logical reasoning prevail. In comparison with other literary forms, the *quaestio* attached more importance to logical inference and philosophical speculation, thus made maximum allowance for unconventional personal thought. Under the form of *quaestio*, a philosophical argumentation within theology is allowed to run its course without being necessarily subject to either an apologetic or an edifying tone. In addition, the quality of one’s arguments can be appreciated on its own merit, irrespective of one’s personal stance.

Prior to the emergence of the *quaestio* at the University of Paris, the quest for a new expression of theological thinking had already begun. The most outrageous attempt was made by Peter Abelard (1079-1142) in his *Sic et non*,<sup>298</sup> which comprises a series of

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<sup>297</sup> Etienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (1955), 248.

<sup>298</sup> Priscilla Throop (trans.), *Yes and No: The Complete English Translation of Peter Abelard's Sic Et Non*, second edition, (2008).

158 theological issues, each furnished with a set of patristic quotations that logically contradict one another.<sup>299</sup> Abelard does not give his own theological speculation, he simply provides a list of contradictory statements made by authoritative writers. Through the format of *Sic et non*, Abelard makes the point that to the same question both positive and negative answers can be drawn from the patristic tradition.

Unlike *Sic et non*, which allows both sides to be presented equally, the *quaestio* compels the author to take a position and narrow the scope of his answer to either negative or positive. After making that decision, he must give a consistent proof of his thesis. One is free to take a negative or positive stance, but that is as far as personal free choice can go on this issue. Once the stance is taken, one must adhere to it and justify it by all means. Having clarified his stance, the author normally lists the theses that are contrary to his own view, and then refutes them one by one; once the refutation is completed, the author's stance will be justified. The justification requires many kinds of intellectual expertise, including textual scholarship in biblical studies, professional training in patristic theology, command of scholastic language, and skill in rhetoric and logic. In particular the *quaestio* calls for focused, in-depth, philosophical elucidation of one specific theological theme.

The writing of theological *quaestio* appears little different from formulating a philosophical question, except that the topic under discussion is derived from a theological background, as will be shown in the next section. In terms of register, both the Aristotelian and Neoplatonic vocabularies can be employed; in terms of logical inference, Aristotle's syllogism is taken for granted. Thus, during the Middle Ages, both the concepts and method of philosophy were being systematically grafted onto the theological setting, and largely dominated the proceedings of the theological discussion. The format of *quaestio*, with its openness to both negative and affirmative, suggests a kind of richness and diversity. It poses a challenging question on the tradition from which it arises, and in that sense it can be regarded as the self-reflection of the tradition itself. The form of *quaestio* allows the author to give full play to his sharpness of mind in justifying one statement and refuting its counterpart, and enables theologians to

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<sup>299</sup> Philipp W. Rosemann in particular highlights the mode of expressing in his study of Peter Lombard. He regards the Hughonian (Hugh of St. Victor 1096-1141) and the Abelardian (Peter Abelard c. 1079-1142) as two main streams preceding Peter Lombard, with regard to the schemata for the structuring of the theological material, and he traces the history back to Augustine. See Rosemann, *Peter Lombard* (Oxford and New York, 2004), 15.

philosophise in the most sophisticated manner. Although biblical texts are sometimes quoted in the disputed questions, they serve to back up a certain proposition, and in many cases these scriptural texts have to be reinterpreted so that they fit well with the whole argumentation. We see some examples of this in Eckhart's *Parisian Question 1*. Despite the fact that most scholastic questions are heavily loaded with philosophical categories and proceed according to logical rules, nevertheless they are embedded in the longstanding tradition of biblical studies. The form of *quaestio* develops over the history of the scholastic movement, to become the typical literary form of scholasticism. It makes room for one's personal thought, especially for those who run against the prevailing trend, Eckhart probably among them.

### **2.1.2 Parisian Questions: a Theological Declaration**

Like many scholastic theologians, including his contemporary counterpart from the Franciscan school Duns Scotus (1250-1308), Eckhart conducted theological discussions in the form of *quaestiones*. Some of these he later published, others were preserved by opponents and readers. Only a few, so far, have been translated into English, as the *Parisian Questions*. As mentioned earlier, ten *Parisian Questions* have been proved to be from Eckhart's hand, and it is possible that more may be discovered in the future. As what survive are all *reportationes* of these *Questions*, the texts only sketch out key points of Eckhart's arguments, often presented in a strikingly concise and dense manner. Nonetheless, these *Questions* capture the most controversial topics of the day and give an indication of the heated debate going on at that time. Apart from the concise and innovative style, the arguments contained in these questions suggest an explicit continuation and the divergence between Eckhart and Thomas Aquinas. Almost without exception Eckhart begins, before presenting his unusual way or new proof, by giving a brief introduction to the groundwork done by Thomas. Based on the procedure of Eckhart's arguments, we may conclude that the Thomistic views familiar to the theologians and students of the day constitute the preliminary step for Eckhart's new way of thinking. The same controversial topics that had been dealt with by Thomas continually captivate Eckhart and press him to move one step further, applying the form of *quaestio*. Thus the continuity and the subtle difference or contrast between Thomas and Eckhart come to the fore in Eckhart's disputed questions. When handling these heated topics Eckhart explicitly points out what he has learned from his Dominican brother and on precisely which point he disagrees with him.

In comparison with his biblical commentaries, these disputed *quaestiones* bear a more pointed and directed mark of Eckhart's originality as a scholastic thinker, in the sense that here one sees the whole skeleton of his reformatory thought. In other words, the outline of his speculative theology is clearly sketched out in the form of *quaestio*, and nearly all the main ideas are briefly touched upon in the book of *Questions*, which will find striking resonance in his commentaries and homilies. It is clear that in his composing of the very short disputed *Questions*, Eckhart's thinking has stepped out of the Thomistic framework, and he has attempted a new approach, rising above the overly abundant sources at his disposal.<sup>300</sup>

Overall the *Parisian Questions* set the tone of Eckhartian thought; through this series of questions Eckhart makes a theological declaration, while also distinguishing himself from earlier approaches, most specifically that of Thomas, despite the common ground between them. One theme that is persistently touched upon in the *Parisian Questions* is the notion of intellect. Not only does Eckhart initiate his speculative theology by affirming the primacy of knowing over being in *Parisian Question 1*, but he keeps on expounding the concept of intellect in the other *Questions*. This line of thought can be summarised into five points: 1) intellect and the superior terms; 2) intellect and being; 3) intellect and will; 4) intellect and human knowledge of things; 5) divine intellect and human intellect as being one intellect.

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<sup>300</sup> In his introduction to his English translation of *Parisian Questions and Prologues*, Armand A. Maurer addresses the issue of the sources that have an explicit impact on Eckhart. See *Parisian Questions and Prologues* (1974), 12.

### 2.1.2.1 *Intellect and the Superior Terms*

At the very beginning of his *Prologue to the Opus Tripartitum*, Eckhart calls attention to a radical distinction between the two types of terms in his work, namely the superior terms and the inferior terms. The former refers to the general terms such as unity, truth and goodness, which are ‘convertible with being’ and are prior to this or that being; whereas the latter refers to the terms that are restricted to a genus, species or nature of being.<sup>301</sup> Following that rule Eckhart makes the preliminary point that general terms such as being or existence (*esse*), unity, truth, wisdom, and goodness should by no means be considered ‘after the manner and nature of accidents’.<sup>302</sup> The relation between the two sorts of terms is that the superior terms influence and affect the inferior ones, but are in no way affected or contributed to by the latter. Therefore, the two sorts of terms should be thought of and spoken of differently. Notably, what Eckhart means by the superior or general terms such as being, unity, truth and goodness are actually the so-called transcendentals (*transcendentia*), which only serve to predicate the first cause of things or being as being. The term ‘*transcendentia*’ appears twice in Eckhart’s Latin works: in his commentary on *Genesis*, and in his commentary on *John*. In both cases Eckhart refers *transcendentia* to being, one, truth and good.<sup>303</sup> It is no coincidence that these four general terms also constitute the subjects of the first four treatises (among fourteen) included in the book of *Propositions*, which are particularly addressed by Eckhart in the *Prologue*, as will be discussed later.

It is worth noting that what Eckhart means by the superior terms such as being, one, truth, and good are not only prior to particular things, but are also prior to the perception of particular things; hence they hold priority over whatever notions are derived from the activity of natural reason, for instance, the universals obtained through abstraction.

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<sup>301</sup> Eckhart, *Tabula Prologorum in Opus Tripartitum* n.1 (LW I 1, 129,5-8) (trans. Armand A. Maurer, *Parisian Questions and Prologues*, 1974, 77).

<sup>302</sup> Eckhart, *Prologus generalis in Opus Tripartitum* n.8 (LW I 1, 152,8-11): ‘Primum est quod de terminis generalibus, puta esse, unitate, veritate, sapientia, bonitate et similibus nequaquam est imaginandum vel iudicandum secundum naturam et modum accidentium.’ (Trans. Armand A. Maurer, *Parisian Questions and Prologues*, 1974, 82).

<sup>303</sup> Eckhart, *In Gen.* n.128 (LW I 1, 282,10-283,6): ‘Ubi tria sunt notanda. Primo, quod bonitas et eius ratio totaliter et se tota consistit in fine solo et est idem cum fine ipso convertibiliter. Propter quod deus, utpote finis omnium, est et dicitur Luc. 18 solus bonus. Ex fine ergo accipit bonitatem omnem quam habet ens quodlibet citra finem, sicut diaeta, medicina et urina nihil prorsus habent sanitatis in se formaliter plus quam lapis vel lignum, sed ab ipsa sola sanitate, quae in animali est formaliter, dicuntur sana secundum naturam analogiae, qua omnia huiusmodi transcendentia se habent ad creaturas, puta ens, unum, verum, bonum.’

And, Eckhart, *Sermo XXXVII* n.377 (LW IV 363,8-9): ‘*Unus deus*. Nota: unum est essentialis proprietas superioris sive prioris aut primi.’

By contrast the inferior terms pertain to the categories employed to describe the properties of a determinate being. In short, the superior terms should only be attributed to the pure substance or the first cause of all things, whereas the inferior terms can be properly applied to the accidents or the determinate, particular beings. Such a radical distinction between the two types of terms suggests a fundamental difference between the two different modes of thinking and expressing; in other words, God or the divine essence should be thought of and spoken of in a manner that is totally different from the way we approach the things that are derived from the first cause. Hence, the superior terms should be considered as the transcendentals, which hold priority over particular things in both ontological and epistemological senses. As a result, they should be differentiated from the inferior terms, which mainly refer to the categories that are proper to the accidents.

The historical and doctrinal background of Eckhart's treatment of the transcendentals can be traced back to what Kant called the 'Transcendental Philosophy of the Ancients' in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (B113). In line with Kant's classification, Jan A. Aertsen takes the medieval doctrine of the transcendental as a distinctive form within the longstanding tradition of transcendental philosophy.<sup>304</sup> However, Aertsen points out that Kant misunderstood the scholastic thesis '*quodlibet ens est unum, verum, bonum*', as he took this to be tautological. Aertsen explains that although transcendental terms are convertible, they are not synonyms on that account, because synonyms signify the same thing according to the same *ratio*.<sup>305</sup> The doctrine of the transcendental in the Middle Ages is closely tied up with the reception of Aristotle's works in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Being confronted with a comprehensive philosophical explanation of reality as seen in Aristotle, the medieval thinkers in the Latin world felt for the first time the pressing need to account for the proper foundation of philosophy. The transcendental way of thought can be deemed the answer to this challenge. Even before the systematic exposition in Thomas Aquinas, inquiries into the transcendental are already seen in the works of Philip the Chancellor (d.1218), Alexander of Hales (d.1245) and Albert the

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<sup>304</sup> Jan A. Aertsen's research offers a unique perspective in the current studies of medieval philosophy. In his *Introduction* to the groundbreaking work *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals*, Aertsen gives an in-depth criticism of the three influential approaches represented by E. Gilson, N. Kretzmann and A. de Libera; finally he puts forward the thesis that medieval philosophy can be better received as a transcendental way of thought. See Jan A. Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals: the Case of Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden, New York and Koln, 1996), 1-24.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.* 97.



Great (d.1280).<sup>306</sup> Aertsen further clarifies the specific meaning of ‘transcendental’ in the scholastic sense: based on a close examination of the medieval texts, he puts forward the thesis that the medieval notion of transcendental indicates what is opposed to and surpasses the categories, whereas in Kant the transcendental is concerned with the categories of reason. The emergence of the term *transcendens* in the thirteenth century bespeaks a philosophical reflection that is aware of its going further than the Aristotelian doctrine of the categories of being, as shown in Thomas’s *De Veritate* 1.1. Aertsen also highlights the point that the origin of the term *transcendens* is not the Platonic-Augustinian ascent to God, in the sense that it signifies a separate reality ‘beyond’ the categories. On the contrary, transcendentals surpass the categories because they are common to the categories and run through all of them.<sup>307</sup>

Aertsen’s reading of medieval philosophy in general and his study of Thomas in particular throw illuminating light on the thought of Eckhart, because Eckhart in a sense follows in the footsteps of his Dominican brother. Like Thomas, who begins expounding the transcendental terms such as ‘Being’, ‘good’, ‘one’, and ‘true’ in the early stages of his academic career, as for instance in his commentary on the first book of the *Sentences* (8.1.3), Eckhart deals with these terms in the first book of his *Opus Tripartitum* or *Three-part Work*, namely the book of *Propositions*. According to what Eckhart states in the *Prologue*, the book of *Propositions* contains a thousand propositions or more<sup>308</sup> and is divided into 14 treatises, which probably makes reference to Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* in 14 books.<sup>309</sup> These propositions, as Eckhart suggests in the *Prologue*, will provide hermeneutical keys to the understanding of the subsequent quaestiones, commentaries and even sermons or homilies.<sup>310</sup> Therefore it is necessary to look first at the book of *Propositions*, before exploring Eckhart’s notion of intellect expressed in the book of *Questions*.

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<sup>306</sup> For a detailed textual study of this line of thought, see Jan A. Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals* (1996), 25-70.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.* 92-3.

<sup>308</sup> Eckhart, *Prologus generalis in Opus Tripartitum*, n.3 (LW I 1, 149,6) (trans. Armand A. Maurer in *Parisian Questions and Prologues*, 1974, 80).

<sup>309</sup> Markus Vinzent addresses this question and gives a range of references to the various expert views on this point. See Markus Vinzent, *The Art of Detachment* (2011), footnote 125, 39.

<sup>310</sup> Eckhart, *Prologus generalis in Opus Tripartitum*, n.11 (LW I 1, 156,4-7), ‘Tertio et ultimo est praenotandum quod opus secundum, similiter et tertium sic dependet a primo opere, scilicet propositionum, quod sine ipso sunt parvae utilitatis, eo quod quaestionum declarationes et auctoritatum expositiones plerumque fundantur supra aliquam propositionum.’ (Trans. Armand A. Maurer in *Parisian Questions and Prologues*, 1974, 85.)

The 14 treatises enclosed in the book of *Propositions* correspond to 14 general terms on which they focus. Eckhart allows each of the 14 terms to stand with its opposite, hence a list of 14 pairs as follows:

- 1) being (*esse*) / nothing (*nihil*)
- 2) unity or oneness (*unitas, uno*) / many (*multum*)
- 3) truth or true (*veritas, vero*) / false (*falsum*)
- 4) goodness (*bonitas, bono*) / evil (*malo*),
- 5) love or charity/sin
- 6) honour, virtue, right / wickedness, vice, oblique
- 7) whole / parts
- 8) indistinct / distinct
- 9) superior / inferior
- 10) first / last
- 11) idea / unformed
- 12) that by which something is / that that is
- 13) existence (God) / non-existence
- 14) substance / accident<sup>311</sup>

The four terms that are called *transcendentia* commence Eckhart's 14 treatises. As Eckhart claims that general terms like being, unity, truth, and goodness, and others of this sort, are convertible with being, it follows that he deliberately extends the scope of the transcendentals from the traditionally accepted four (being, one, truth and good) to fourteen. The origin of the fourteen general terms can be traced back to three main

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<sup>311</sup> Eckhart, *Prologus generalis in Opus Tripartitum*, n.4 (LW I 1, 150,1-151,1):

‘Primus tractatus agit de esse et ente et eius opposito quod est nihil.

Secundus de unitate et uno et eius opposito quod est multum.

Tertius de veritate et vero et eius opposito quod est falsum.

Quartus de bonitate et bono et eius opposito, malo.

Quintus de amore et caritate et peccato, ei opposito.

Sextus de honesto, virtute et recto et eorum oppositis, puta turpi, vitio et obliquo.

Septimus de toto et parte, eius opposito.

Octavus de communi et indistincto et horum oppositis, proprio et distincto.

Nonus de natura superioris et inferioris, eius oppositi.

Decimus de primo et novissimo.

Undecimus de idea et ratione et horum oppositis, puta de informi et privatione.

Duodecimus vero de quo est et quod est ei condiviso.

Tertiusdecimus agit de ipso deo summo esse, quod »contrarium non habet nisi non esse « ut ait Augustinus De immortalitate animae et De moribus Manichaeorum.

Quartusdecimus de substantia et accidente.’

(Trans. Armand A. Maurer, *Parisian Questions and Prologues*, 1974, 80-1. Maurer's translation here is slightly altered.)

sources, namely the Aristotelian, Platonic/Neoplatonic and Christian traditions. Eckhart explicitly appropriates the Aristotelian metaphysical terms such as being/non-being, substance/accident, the Platonic notion of 'idea' and the Neoplatonic concept of oneness or unity; the Christian theological terms such as love or charity/sin, virtue/vice are also included.<sup>312</sup> With the thirteenth term, Eckhart directly identifies God with the highest existence, in line with the thought of Augustine.<sup>313</sup>

In the *Prologue* Eckhart continually reminds the reader of the appropriate way in which the general terms should be considered. To Eckhart general terms such as existence, unity, truth, good and so on are *a priori*; they should be considered as transcendentals as they are prior to every aspect of things and precede everything. Hence the aforementioned general terms should by no means be taken as accidents as if they were posterior to the subject and took on existence by inhering in it. Only when it comes to God do the transcendental terms function as a predicate (*secundum adiacens*).<sup>314</sup> God alone is properly called being, one, true and good. In the case of this or that being, for instance, in the propositions such as 'This is a man' or 'A rose is red', the word 'is' serves solely as a copula to connect the predicate and the subject, it does not refer to the existence of 'a man' or 'a rose' or 'redness'.

Eckhart regards these general terms as superior terms and asserts that they are not subject to measures of time or number, nor are they restricted to genus or species. The fact that this is so clearly stressed in the introductory *Prologue* to Eckhart's most important work tells us that it holds the key to a proper understanding of his entire system of thought. What Eckhart writes in the *General Prologue* is intended to provide the reader with a guideline for a proper comprehension of the forthcoming *strange* or even seemingly *false* ideas. Taking the fourteen so-called superior terms as transcendentals, we come to understand that in Eckhart the superior terms are strictly reserved for the divine; nothing other than God is entitled to 'being, one, truth and good'.

It follows that when it comes to the divine, we should at least temporarily leave the inferior terms aside and resort to the superior terms, and adjust our minds accordingly to the transcendental way of thinking and speaking. As the superior terms pertain only to the first cause of all things, it follows that they have their origin in the divine intellect,

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<sup>312</sup> For a detailed analysis, see Markus Vinzent, *The Art of Detachment* (2011), 1-50.

<sup>313</sup> Augustine, *De Immortalitate Animae*, 12; *De Moribus Ecclesiae et de Moribus Manichaeorum*, II, 1.

<sup>314</sup> For the distinction between 'is' as a predicate and a copula, see Thomas *In II Perihermenias*, lect. 2 (Rome, 1882) I, 79-80, nn.2-5; Aristotle, *Peri Hermenias*, 10, 19b 18-20.

and thus ontologically precede the human intellect. Nevertheless, once we start to consider the divine, and attempt to think and speak in the superior terms, the human intellect is indeed performing in the way that suits the nature of the divine and is demanded by the divine. That is to say, when we think of God in terms of existence, unity, truth and goodness, the human intellect is consciously conforming itself to the divine intellect so as to be brought back into the divine.

By contrast, the inferior terms that are used to predicate the particular things, in particular the universals, are derived solely from the conduct of the human intellect. In the *Parisian Questions* Eckhart touches on this topic only briefly, without giving detailed elucidation. The point Eckhart intends to stress is that the existence of a universal can only be defined intellectually. The radical distinction between a universal in the intellect and a being in reality is particularly spelt out in *Parisian Question 2*.<sup>315</sup> Here Eckhart highlights the intellectual origin of the universals, and integrates a universal with the act of understanding through which the universal is produced. Eckhart allows a universal to enjoy its existence purely in the intellect. A universal, as the product of the act of knowing, only exists in the intellect. Eckhart seems to focus on the intellectual nature of the universals, despite the fact that he does not openly deny the link between the abstract universal terms and the real things to which the universals correspond. Here we see a subtle divergence from the Thomistic approach. Although Thomas also takes the universal as the object of our intellect,<sup>316</sup> the point he intends to stress is that the universal is produced through the conduct of human reason, namely abstracting a universal from the particulars. Thomas also explains how the intellect abstracts the universal from the particular or the intelligible species from the phantasm,<sup>317</sup> whereas in Eckhart the focus of attention shifts to the independence of the mode of knowing in contrast to the mode of being. Eckhart highlights the point that a universal is generated by knowing and the act of knowing is performed in the intellect. Therefore the universals, like mathematical entities, are rooted in nowhere but the intellect.<sup>318</sup>

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<sup>315</sup> Eckhart, *Quaest. Par. II* nn. 1-10 (LW V 49,4-54,6) (trans. Armand A. Maurer in *Parisian Questions and Prologues*, 1974, 51-4).

<sup>316</sup> Thomas, *Summa Theol.*, I, q.86, a.1-2.

<sup>317</sup> Thomas, *Summa Theol.*, I, q.85, a.1.

<sup>318</sup> Eckhart, *Quaest. Par. II* n.9 (LW V 53,14-5), (trans. Armand A. Maurer in *Parisian Questions and Prologues*, 1974, 54).

Unlike Thomas, who holds fast to the Aristotelian principle and takes the universal as the result of abstraction and thus posterior to the particular things, Eckhart pays more attention to, or even shows preference for, Platonism, despite the fact that he does not openly dispute with Thomas on this point. This can be referred back to the aforementioned fourteen treatises, in particular the eleventh (idea/unformed), which evidently suggests an absolute superiority of idea and reason over the unformed. Through his *Parisian Questions* Eckhart keeps affirming his stance as to the primacy of knowing over being, of intellectual conception over the real existence of particular things, and this holds the key to his theological speculation. The priority of knowing over being is explicitly expressed in *Parisian Question 1*, as will be discussed in the following section, and this line of thought is extensively unfolded in *Parisian Question 2*, in which Eckhart further expounds the difference between the intellect and being, between a being in the mind and a being in a real sense. A close examination of the five newly re-discovered *Parisian Questions* indicates that the same point is particularly addressed in the second and the fourth. In the second, ‘Is the essence of God more actual than the [personal] property?’ Eckhart draws attention to the difference between the act according to the thing and the act according to the mode of knowing. The latter, he says, ‘is rather to be taken towards the part of the substance’. Likewise in the fourth, ‘Whether the difference with regard to the intellect is prior to the difference with regard to the thing?’<sup>319</sup> Eckhart takes the same stance, arguing that if the difference is taken in the sense of the real existence of particular things, then the difference with regard to the thing is prior to the difference with regard to the intellect, as is widely assumed. However, if the question is read in intellectual terms, we have to say that the differentiation performed in the intellect is prior to any difference in things.

Overall Eckhart pays a great deal of attention to the superior terms, which we may deem the transcendental terms in comparison with the categories that serve to predicate particular things or the accidents. His intensive emphasis on this aspect suggests a new way of doing theology, which is to think and talk about God in the superior terms and make sense of the world in accordance with these terms. Despite the fact that we employ the inferior terms in real life and that human reason also starts from perceiving the properties of particular things through the power of the senses, when it comes to the

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<sup>319</sup> Eckhart, the fourth rediscovered *Parisian Question*, *Quaestio Par. Nov. IV* (Dondaine 42-4): ‘Utrum differentia secundum rationem sit prior quam differentia secundum rem?’ in *Magistri Eckhardi: Quaestiones Parisienses Supplementum*, Herausgegeben von Loris Sturlese (Stuttgart, 2011), 469.

divine, Eckhart forcefully suggests, we should switch to a different mode of thinking and speaking, which in most cases means to be mentally detached from the knowledge of things we have possessed and accumulated. Put more straightforwardly, we should start from the viewpoint of the divine, thus see things through God and in God, not otherwise.

#### **2.1.2.2 Intellect and Being**

Eckhart's contemplation of the divine is, to a great extent, based on his thorough reflection on the ontological thinking of Thomas. Following Thomas's thesis that God's knowing is the substance/essence of the divine, Eckhart pushes the question of God's knowing and being one step further, shifting the ontological ground from God's being to his knowing. In contrast to the traditional Thomistic solution, which gives priority to the being of God, in his *Parisian Question 1* Eckhart pushes to the fore God's knowing. His penetrating argument starts with the six proofs provided by Thomas in his *Summa contra Gentiles* (I, q.45) and *Summa Theologica* (I, q.14, a.4). After giving a list of Thomas's points, Eckhart concludes that God does everything through his existence, both internally in the Godhead and externally in creatures; in other words, God acts and knows through his existence. This, clearly, is what he has learned from Thomas. Whilst introducing the Thomistic viewpoints, Eckhart runs briefly through their logical inferences, which makes it explicit that Eckhart understands perfectly the logical proceedings behind Thomas's metaphysical proofs. Based on a thorough study of Thomas's work, Eckhart comes to his own view, which forms a contrast to that of Thomas, as shown above. This leads to the crucial part of this disputed question, where Eckhart openly declares: 'It is not my present opinion that God understands because he exists, but rather that he exists because he understands.'<sup>320</sup>

Following that declaration, Eckhart puts forward his own thesis: God is an intellect and understanding, and his understanding itself is the *ground* of his existence (my italics). Eckhart deliberately avoids the metaphysical registers that Thomas employs in his *De Ente et Essentia*, *Summa Theologica* and *Summa contra Gentiles*, in which God is depicted as the one and only being in which *esse* is identical with essence, or as the

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<sup>320</sup> Eckhart, *Quaest. Par. I* n.4 (LW V 40,5-7), (trans. Armand A. Maurer, *Parisian Questions and Prologues*, 1974, 45).

first cause or the first immobile mover, based on Aristotle's *Physics*.<sup>321</sup> In contrast to Thomas's lengthy exposition of God's existence, Eckhart shifts the focus from 'existence' to 'understanding' and picks the word '*ground*'<sup>322</sup> to describe the priority of 'understanding' over 'existence' in God. This is seen again at the end of this disputed question, where Eckhart maintains that God as an intellect is the cause of all existence and the '*ground*' of all things.

It is notable that the problem of infinite regress is not even touched upon in Eckhart's arguments, despite its significance to Thomas's proof of God's existence. Instead Eckhart resorts to the Neoplatonic source the *Book of Causes* (*Liber de Causis*),<sup>323</sup> and takes from it one proposition, 'The first of created things is existence'<sup>324</sup> to back up his unconventional reading of scripture. Eckhart gives two particular examples to illustrate this point. He first picks up a verse from *John* 1:3 '*All things were made through him*', and points out that it should be read in a different way: '*All things that were made through him, exist*.'<sup>325</sup> After the gospel of *John*, he turns to the Old Testament and highlights the verse in *Ecclesiasticus* 24: '*From the beginning and before all ages I have been created*.' As in the first case, Eckhart offers an alternative to the conventional way; thus the verse is to be read as '*From the beginning and before created ages, I am*.'<sup>326</sup> By simply changing the position of the pause of the verses, without changing the order of the words, Eckhart manages to insert his thought grammatically into the scriptural texts. This kind of skilful wordplay paves the way for an entirely new reception of the scriptural texts. In the light of his creative reading of scripture, it becomes explicit that Eckhart's daring and innovative claim has scriptural support from

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<sup>321</sup> For a detailed analysis of Thomas's exposition of God's being, see John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas - from finite being to uncreated being* (Washington, D.C., 2000), 400-41.

<sup>322</sup> It is hard to define the meaning of 'ground' in the context of Eckhart, because the word '*grunt*' is employed in a rich variety of ways. As pointed out by McGinn and other scholars such as Susanne K öbele, the ground-language in Eckhart aims primarily to predicate indistinct identity of God and human, hence '*grunt*' is not a state or condition, but is rather 'grounding' - the event of being in a fused relation. See Bernard McGinn, *The Harvest of Mysticism in Medieval Germany* (1300-1500) (New York, 2005), 121.

<sup>323</sup> This book was initially attributed to Aristotle; with the development of the translation project in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, it was proved to be extracted from Proclus's *Element of Theology*.

<sup>324</sup> Pseudo-Aristotle, *Liber de Causis*, IV 37: 'Prima rerum creaturarum est esse et non est ante ipsum creatum aliud.'

<sup>325</sup> Eckhart, *Quaest. Par. I* n.4 (LW V 41,4-6): 'Et sequitur post verbum assumptum Ioh. 1: "omnia per ipsum facta sunt", ut sic legatur: "omnia per ipsum facta sunt", ut ipsis factis ipsum esse post conveniat.' (Trans. Armand A. Maurer, *Parisian Questions and Prologues*, 1974, 45.)

<sup>326</sup> Eckhart, *Quaest. Par. I* n.4 (LW V 41,11-2): 'Et si dicatur quod immo, quia Eccli. 24: "ab initio et ante saecula creata sum", potest exponi "create", id est genita. Sedaliter dico sic: "ab initio et ante saecula create" "sum".' (Trans. Armand A. Maurer, *Parisian Questions and Prologues*, 1974, 46.)

both the New and Old Testaments. Hence it is justified by the holy scriptures that existence does not hold ontological priority, but falls into the category of what is created; God as creator is the divine intellect.

According to Eckhart, the reason for the superiority/priority of intellect over existence consists precisely in its purity of existence. He starts with the Neoplatonic notion that takes existence as the first creation of intelligence, and treats it as a self-evident principle throughout his argument. When, at the end of the discussion, he identifies intellect as purity of existence, Eckhart clearly turns to Aristotle's *De Anima*. Aristotle's definition is decisive to Eckhart's notion of intellect; in his *De Anima* Aristotle points out the resemblance between intellect and the sense<sup>327</sup> of sight: just as the power of sight must be colourless so that it can perceive all colours, the intellect, because it possesses no natural form of its own, holds the capacity for all forms.<sup>328</sup> In other words, it is the purity of forms that gives intellect the power to know all forms.

The concept of intellect, when transplanted from the Aristotelian philosophical framework into the medieval Christian setting, is bound to assume a theological colour. Eckhart's understanding of the divine intellect is tinted with both Neoplatonic and Aristotelian influences. Although the Neoplatonic doctrine that intellect is superior/prior to existence was familiar to many theologians of the time, and Aristotle's *De Anima* aroused immense interest, it is Eckhart who formally redefines God as an intellect which is not existence but the purity of existence.<sup>329</sup>

### **2.1.2.3 Intellect and Will**

The question concerning the relation of intellect and will marks the fundamental disagreement between the two dominant schools of the day. The debate between Eckhart and Gonsalvo of Spain in *Parisian Question 3*<sup>330</sup> reveals the doctrinal divergence between the Dominicans and the Franciscans. In this disputed question

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<sup>327</sup> Reiner Manstetten stresses the point that in the Christian context the Aristotelian theory of senses, in particular the structure of recognition, has been applied to the knowledge of God. See Reiner Manstetten, *Esse est Deus: Meister Eckharts christologische Versöhnung von Philosophie und Religion und ihre Ursprünge in der Tradition des Abendlandes* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1993), 385.

<sup>328</sup> Aristotle, *De Anima*, II, 7, 418b 26-27; III, 4, 429a 24.

Particularly important is *De Anima* III 5, in which Aristotle depicts mind (intellect) as capable of being all things and of making all things; in a sense mind is immortal.

<sup>329</sup> This does not necessarily contradict what he says in *Commentary on Exodus*. This question will be dealt with in the next section of this chapter.

<sup>330</sup> This is a disputed question of master Gonsalvo of Spain, which contains the arguments of Eckhart. Eckhart, *Quaestio Par. III* nn.5-20 (LW V 58,16-64,4), (trans. Armand A. Maurer, *Parisian Questions and Prologues*, 1974, 58-67).



Eckhart's thought concerning the superiority of intellect over will gains a focused expression. Eckhart, in line with his Dominican brother Thomas, takes an affirmative stance towards the superiority of intellect over will, whereas the opposite stance is maintained by Gonsalvo.

In this question we see that Eckhart carefully adjusts his tone along with the proceeding of the argument. As elsewhere, Eckhart opens the debate with what he has learned from Thomas rather than starting with his own ideas:

Against this position some authors present the following arguments to show that the intellect, its act, and its habit are more excellent than the will, its act, and its habit.<sup>331</sup>

Here '*some authors*' refers to Thomas Aquinas, whose arguments on this topic are found in *Summa Theologica* I q.82. This opening sentence gives the impression that Eckhart would simply present Thomas's view in his debate with Gonsalvo. But the development of the argument gradually makes plain a disagreement between Eckhart and Thomas. Certainly Eckhart follows his Dominican brother in some points, but just as surely he diverges from him on others. Take *Parisian Question 3* as an example: among the 11 points included in his reasoning, the first and the final two proceed in the vein of Thomas, while those posited in the middle reflect Eckhart's own original thinking, which marks a separation from the authoritative arguments presented in *Summa Theologica*.

Characteristic of the reasoning in this question is the application of Aristotle's syllogism, namely inferring a conclusion from two premises. Eckhart often starts with a principle that is accepted by both the Dominicans and the Franciscans, and which is treated as the major premise. That is then followed by a Dominican doctrine whose validity may not be recognised by the Franciscans. On the basis of the two premises the conclusion will finally be proved. The same logic of argument is followed by Gonsalvo in his refutation of Eckhart, but he takes the opposite stance and builds his conclusion upon the adversary premise. By refuting the major or the minor premise included in Eckhart's arguments, Gonsalvo comes to a conclusion in sheer opposition to what has been proved by Eckhart. The situation is that each side adheres to a different principle and takes their own principle as the premise, despite following the same logic in debate.

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<sup>331</sup> Eckhart, *Quaest. Par. III* nn. 5-6 (LW V 59,12-4) (trans. Armand A. Maurer, *Parisian Questions and Prologues*, 1974, 58).

For instance, Eckhart begins with the principle that the power, act, or habit whose object is simpler, higher, and prior, is more excellent, to which Gonsalvo expresses his disagreement and asserts that the contrary is true in creatures, because something that is prior and simpler is not necessarily more perfect, as is shown in the case of the universals. Gonsalvo takes it for granted that a universal is preceded by particular things, but to Eckhart that is not necessarily the case.

Leaving aside the fundamental disagreement between Eckhart and Gonsalvo or the Dominicans and the Franciscans that is manifest in the debate, we come back to the subtle difference between Eckhart and Thomas, as revealed in this question. Following the aforementioned principle which serves as the major premise, Eckhart brings in a well-known Thomistic view and allows it to be the minor premise of his argument. He rephrases it as ‘the object of the intellect and its habit and act, which is being, is more primary, simpler, and loftier than the object of the will which is the *good*, for the whole nature of the good is existence itself’.<sup>332</sup> In Thomas a different technical term is employed for the object of intellect, the *idea of appetible good*. Before claiming the superiority of intellect over will, Thomas first defines the two different ways – absolutely and relatively – in which ‘superiority’ is to be considered. Thomas claims that when a thing is considered in itself it is being considered to be such absolutely; but with regard to something else it will be considered to be such relatively. What Thomas has cautiously put forward here, to be precise, is that when intellect and will are considered with regard to themselves it is justified to take intellect as superior to will. Nevertheless, relatively speaking, when intellect and will are both to be considered in relation to a third thing, it is possible that the power of will holds superiority due to the superiority of its object. For instance, when the object of will is God, will is more noble than intellect because the object itself is above intellect.<sup>333</sup>

Clearly, such a distinction between the absolute sense and the relative sense is essential in Thomas’s exposition, but it is totally omitted from Eckhart’s arguments. The reason for this is probably to be found in the profound implication of the above distinction. Had Eckhart taken the relative sense into account, he would have had to reverse the order between will and intellect so far as the divine is concerned. That

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<sup>332</sup> Eckhart, *Quaestio Par. III* n.6 (LW V 59,15-7) (trans. Armand A. Maurer, *Parisian Questions and Prologues*, 1974, 58-9).

<sup>333</sup> Thomas, *Summa Theol.*, I, q.82, a.3.

compromise does not seem to be what Eckhart intends, as we see that his reasoning takes on an uncompromising tone as the arguments proceed.

Having first presented Thomas's view, Eckhart starts to demonstrate his own perspective in the middle part of the discussion. For that purpose seven points are briefly addressed (Nos.3-9).<sup>334</sup> A close examination of the seven points suggests that Eckhart goes further than repeating the conventional view of love or charity as it is articulated by Thomas in *Summa Theologica*. For Thomas, despite stressing the superiority of intellect over will, still maintains that the love of God is superior to the knowledge of God. A good example is that when confronted with the scriptural text 'If I should know all mysteries, and if I should have all faith, and have not charity, I am nothing' (1 *Cor.* 13:2), Thomas replies: 'This reason is verified of the will as compared with what is above the soul. For charity is the virtue by which we love God.'<sup>335</sup> Different from his Dominican brother, Eckhart removes the condition or limitation that Thomas sets up for the superiority of the intellect over will, whereby it is only in the absolute sense that intellect is superior to will. To Eckhart the superiority of intellect should by no means be compromised. By stressing the purification of the intellective operation, Eckhart extends the superiority of intellect over will to the realm of the divine. Based on the thesis he has proposed in *Parisian Question* 1, that God is understanding himself and not existence, Eckhart puts forward another unconventional view in this question, that one is pleasing to God precisely because he understands; if knowledge is taken away absolutely nothing is left.<sup>336</sup> This claim obviously transgresses the line carefully drawn by Thomas, and sounds 'strange' to his counterpart Gonsalvo. The latter's refutation is based upon the axiom that knowledge cannot be separated from love. Gonsalvo deems it utterly absurd to state that one is pleasing to God precisely because he understands. He retorts that if that is the case, every knower would be pleasing to God and one who knows most would be more pleasing to God, which is plainly false because there are many ordinary men and women more pleasing to God than the well educated. Gonsalvo's counterargument is logical in itself; however his

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<sup>334</sup> Eckhart, *Quaest. Par. III* nn.8-14 (LW V 60,5-62,2) (trans. Armand A. Maurer, *Parisian Questions and Prologues*, 1974, 59-60).

<sup>335</sup> Thomas, *Summa Theol.*, I, q.82, a.3.

<sup>336</sup> Maurer makes the point (footnote 11) that according to Eckhart sanctifying grace is in the intellect as in a subject, as shown in his commentary on the *Book of Wisdom (In Sap.)*; see Armand A. Maurer (trans.), *Parisian Questions and Prologues* (1974), 59.

refutation misses the point, because what Eckhart means by understanding or knowing refers to the mode of purifying, which has nothing to do with increase in quantity.

In addition, Eckhart attributes freedom to intellect rather than will. To justify this unconventional view he addresses two points in particular: 1) Intellect is unencumbered by matter, hence is the most reflexive, for the power of reflection resides in understanding, not in being; 2) The ground of freedom is in the intellect, for a choice is a conclusion following upon deliberation; therefore it holds true that freedom resides primarily and originally in the intellect, although it is formally in the will. In response to the first point, Gonsalvo first refutes Eckhart's assertion that immateriality is the cause of freedom, and then points out that, given that what is free is immaterial, immateriality alone does not suffice for freedom; furthermore, both the intellect and will are immaterial. To the second, Gonsalvo responds that only when 'rational' expresses the definition of an essence and not of a power, will it hold true that man has free will because he is rational. Intellect and will, insofar as both are defined as powers of the soul whose operations are free from bodily organs, should be attributed to the same level of freedom. According to Gonsalvo, that is precisely how far one can go in this matter; by attempting to push it one step further Eckhart is bound to fall into fallacy. The unique reflexive nature of understanding stressed by Eckhart is not touched upon in Gonsalvo's refutation. According to Thomas, both intellect and will are capable of self-reflection, but Eckhart seems to attribute the reflexive power only to the intellect.<sup>337</sup>

Eckhart comes back to the groundwork of Thomas at the end of the discussion. In *Summa Theologica*, Thomas has already expounded one fundamental difference between the action of the intellect and that of the will. He writes 'the action of the intellect consists in this – that the idea of the thing understood is in the one who understands; while the act of the will consists in this – that the will is inclined to the thing itself as existing in itself'.<sup>338</sup> It follows that 'good and evil', as objects of the will, are in things; whereas 'truth and error', as objects of the intellect, are in the mind.<sup>339</sup> On the basis of Thomas's exposition, Eckhart concludes that the nature of truth is in the intellect, as the nature of truth is the nature of the best, hence the nature of the best resides in intellect rather than in will. In respect to this statement Gonsalvo's refutation

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<sup>337</sup> See Thomas, *De Veritate* q.22, a.12. 'The higher powers of the soul, because immaterial, are capable of reflecting upon themselves. Both the will and the intellect, therefore, reflect upon themselves, upon each other, upon the essence of the soul, and upon all its powers.'

<sup>338</sup> Thomas, *Summa Theol.*, I, q.82, a.3.

<sup>339</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, vi.

only serves to disqualify Eckhart's view; it does not entail proof of the opposite stance. Gonsalvo states that it is fallacious to take truth as the cause of the best, nor is it true that something has the nature of the best because it is known. It is true only when truth and the best are thought to go together, because one cannot exist without the other.

Finally, Eckhart closes his argument by reasserting Thomas's insightful view with regard to the question of whether the will moves the intellect or not.<sup>340</sup> Thinking in the same vein as Thomas, Eckhart makes the point that intellect moves as an end, whereas will moves as an efficient cause. Intellect with its objects moves as the reason for moving, while will moves as a mover. Based on Thomas's exposition, Eckhart draws the conclusion that intellect is more excellent than will as it moves in a nobler way. That obviously goes beyond what Thomas says in *De Veritate* and *Summa Theologica*. In both works Thomas provides in-depth and detailed expositions, but he never claims the superiority of intellect over will on this ground. Rather, Thomas allows the possibility of a reversed order between intellect and will; he makes it clear that will could surpass intellect by virtue of the distinctive nature of its object.<sup>341</sup> Yet despite this subtle difference between Thomas and Eckhart, they do share the principle that intellect moves as an end, which cannot be accepted by the Franciscan master Gonsalvo.<sup>342</sup>

Overall Eckhart follows Thomas closely with regard to the relation of intellect and will; in his debate with Gonsalvo, Eckhart bases almost all of his arguments on Thomas's expositions. However, it is equally significant that Eckhart is not merely repeating what has been said by Thomas; by paraphrasing the Thomistic viewpoints Eckhart manages to bring forward his own thesis, which goes beyond the confines of Thomas's thinking. This can be proved by the aforementioned fact that Eckhart remains oblivious to the absolute/relative distinction made by Thomas, and forcefully pushes the superiority of intellect over will to the realm of the divine. Reviewing the whole discussion we come to see that Eckhart deliberately ignores such a significant distinction between the absolute sense and the relative sense with regard to the meaning of superiority, so that he does not have to circumscribe the superiority of the intellect as Thomas does. It is not appropriate to depict Eckhart as one who is at open defiance with the authoritative view of Thomas. However, a subtle difference does reveal a vital

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<sup>340</sup> See Thomas, *De Veritate* q.22, a.12; *Summa Theol.*, I, q.82, a. 4.

<sup>341</sup> See Thomas, *De Veritate* q.22, a.12.

<sup>342</sup> It is beyond the scope of this book to tackle the debate between the two schools as to intellect and will; suffice it to say that Eckhart takes the Dominican stance fully into account and intends to push it further beyond Thomas's exposition in this disputed question.

divergence between the Thomistic and Eckhartian ways of thinking. Eckhart conscientiously integrates Thomas's thoughts into his reasoning, but not without making subtle changes in some areas, which often results in a concise, coherent and focused argument. His intention, in Eckhart's own words, is to put forward some 'novel, brief, and easy explanations of various questions'.<sup>343</sup> And the *quaestio*, as the typical literary form of theological speculation, allows Eckhart to speak his mind in a relatively free tone. By and large the novelty and unconventionality that characterise Eckhart's thinking come to the fore in his *quaestiones*, as illustrated by the above analysis. Confronting the topic that is vitally important to both the Franciscans and the Dominicans, namely the relation of intellect to will, Eckhart clearly takes the Dominican stance and affirms the superiority of intellect over will. On top of that Eckhart makes his own contribution to the discussion of this matter; his unique voice is not overwhelmed by the systematic expositions provided by Thomas. In both *Parisian Questions* 1 and 3 Eckhart skilfully drops hints as to his divergence from Thomas and makes his uncompromising stance manifest. The superiority of intellect over existence constitutes the core of *Parisian Question* 1, and the superiority of intellect over will is fully unfolded in *Parisian Question* 3. Both indicate a new type of intellectualism that differs considerably from Thomas's. That difference is further elaborated in his commentary on the sacred scriptures, as will be seen in the following section.

#### **2.1.2.4 Intellect and Human Knowledge of Things**

Throughout the *Parisian Questions* Eckhart clarifies a fundamental difference between the human intellect and human knowledge of things. The former indicates the noble nature of human beings and in that sense is identical with the divine intellect,<sup>344</sup> whereas the latter refers to man's intellectual grasp of things, which is caused by things and is heavily dependent on the operation of the senses. The question concerning the nature of intellect and its relevance to human knowledge of things is briefly touched on in the middle part of *Parisian Question* 1 and also at the end of *Parisian Question* 2. In *Question* 1 Eckhart attributes intellect to God the creator after clarifying the creaturely

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<sup>343</sup> Eckhart, *Prologus generalis in Opus Tripartitum* n.2 (LW I, 148,10) (trans. Armand A. Maurer in *Parisian Questions and Prologues*, 1974, 80).

<sup>344</sup> This will be discussed in the following section.

nature of existence.<sup>345</sup> That claim is further elaborated from the following three aspects: 1) understanding is superior to existence and belongs to a different order; 2) understanding itself and whatever has to do with intellect such as truth, belongs to a different order than existence and whatever has to do with existence such as being and goodness; and 3) our knowledge is fundamentally differentiated from God's as his knowledge is the cause of things whereas our knowledge is caused by things.<sup>346</sup>

The first two statements intend to clarify or reinforce the distinction between intellect and existence, on the ground of one axiom – intellect is superior and prior to existence; whereas the third is suggesting a radical difference between the divine knowledge which holds the ontological priority over things as the very cause of them, and the knowledge generated in the human mind which is caused by things, hence is ontologically posterior to them. Here Eckhart shows no interest in developing a parallel or any resemblance between man's knowledge (of things) and the knowledge conceived by the divine; on the contrary, he sets them in two different orders on account of the mode of causality. As God's knowledge stands in a different order than ours, it follows that we cannot attain to the divine realm by means of accumulating our knowledge of things. Hence the kind of approach which intends to seek the divine through things should be refuted, and this refutation is suggesting a new approach to God, which we may call the way of purification, alluding to the message Eckhart conveys in *Parisian Question 1*. That message can be summarised thus: God is an intellect which is not mixed with existence yet contains everything in purity, fullness, and perfection, as intellect is the cause of being.<sup>347</sup>

Eckhart's formulation concerning God as shown above entails both negation and affirmation. He begins by negating what does not belong to God, which is existence, and then affirms that God, as purity of existence, stands for 'the cause of all existence

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<sup>345</sup> Eckhart does not seem clearly to differentiate *ens* from *esse* as Thomas does; both *ens* and *esse* are employed in his arguments.

<sup>346</sup> Eckhart, *Quaest. Par. I* n.8 (LW V 44,10-4): 'Differt enim nostra scientia a scientia dei, quia scientia dei est causa rerum et scientia nostra est causata a rebus. Et ideo cum scientia nostra cadat sub ente, a quo causatur, et ipsum ens pari ratione cadit sub scientia dei; et ideo, quidquid est in deo, est super ipsum esse et est totum intelligere.' (Trans. Armand A. Maurer in *Parisian Questions and Prologues*, 1974, 48.) This topic reappears in Eckhart's commentary on *Exodus*; further discussion will be developed in the following section.

<sup>347</sup> Eckhart, *Quaest. Par. I* n.10 (LW V 46,2-6), 'Cum igitur deus sit universalis causa entis, nihil quod est in deo, habet rationem entis, sed habet rationem intellectus et ipsius intelligere, de cuius ratione non est, quod causam habeat, sicut est de ratione entis quod sit causatum; et in ipso intelligere omnia continentur in virtute sicut in causa suprema omnium.' (Trans. Armand A. Maurer in *Parisian Questions and Prologues*, 1974, 49.)

and pre-contains everything'; moreover: 'God pre-contains everything in purity, fullness and perfection, more abundantly and extensively.'<sup>348</sup> Hence the initial act of negating is finally incorporated into that of affirming; in other words, negation results in affirmation. In Eckhart, the mode of negation in the sense of clearing away from God what does not belong to God never ends up with negation *per se* or nothing whatsoever, as he makes it clear that: 'I deny existence itself and suchlike of God so that he may be the cause of all existence and pre-contains all things.'<sup>349</sup>

Eckhart's negation of existence in God suggests that God ought not to be regarded as the climax of a hierarchical cosmos or the aggregate of the existence of the creaturely beings. Following that notion of God, it holds true that our knowledge of things does not lead to the knowledge of God, as they stand in two different orders. It is the purification rather than the accumulation of the knowledge of things that leads to the divine. Referring this line of argument to the propositions Eckhart lists in the *General Prologue*, in particular the relation of the superior to the inferior, we may conclude that human knowledge of things which sits in the inferior cannot add anything to the superior, which is the knowledge of God.

In *Parisian Question 1* Eckhart indirectly refutes the typical Thomistic approach, namely proceeding from effects to cause, or put another way, from knowledge of things to a 'proportioned' knowledge of God. The point Eckhart makes in *Parisian Question 1* forms a clear contrast to what Thomas says in *Summa Theologica*, I, q.12-'How is God known by us?' This lengthy question comprises 13 articles, and Thomas puts forward his notion of 'proportion' in the first article – 'Whether any created intellect can see the essence of God?' It reads as follows:

Proportion is twofold. In one sense it means a certain relation of one quantity to another, according as double, treble and equal are species of proportion. In another sense every relation of one thing to another is called proportion. And in this sense there can be a proportion of the creature to God, inasmuch as it is related to him as the effect of its cause, and as potentiality to its act; and in this way the created intellect can be proportioned to know God.<sup>350</sup>

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<sup>348</sup> Eckhart, *Quaest. Par. I* n.12 (LW V 48,6-8): 'Dico enim quod deus omnia praehabet in puritate, plenitudine, perfectione, amplius et latius, exsistens radix et causa omnium.' (Trans. Armand A. Maurer in *Parisian Questions and Prologues*, 1974, 50.)

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>350</sup> Thomas, *Summa Theol.*, I, q.12, a.1.



Here Thomas clarifies the two senses in which ‘proportion’ is to be considered, and claims that, in the second sense, ‘proportion’ pertains to the relation of the creature to God the creator, which is regarded as that of ‘the effect to its cause’ or ‘potentiality to its act’. This line of thought is particularly challenged by Eckhart in the third newly re-discovered *Parisian Question*: ‘Whether diversity is a real or an intellectual relation?’<sup>351</sup> Eckhart refutes the view that a real relation could not be grounded in substance; instead he asserts that ‘such is a relation that it sets something real and has a distinct end’, and ‘such is God’s relation to the creature’.<sup>352</sup> Eckhart distinguishes ‘relation’ from the first three categories (substance, quality and quantity) which refer to a thing, and also from the last six categories (place, time, position, state, action, or affection),<sup>353</sup> which predicate a thing under a condition. Eckhart’s new understanding of ‘relation’ is tied up with the notion of ‘ground’. He claims: ‘A relation can neither be conceptualised nor exist without ground’; it follows that the ground ‘belongs to the essence of a relation’. This claim is further backed up from three aspects: 1) a relation is according to its what-it-is an accident, but that it is an accident derives from the ground; 2) a relation differs according to species from another on account of its ground; and 3) a relation insofar as it is a relation is not distinguished from another relation according to its species. Therefore, a relation is distinguished from another relation insofar as it is such a relation. But that it is such [a relation], derives from ground and end.<sup>354</sup>

According to Eckhart’s notion of ‘relation’, God is related to the creature in the sense of *ground* to *end*, rather than cause to effect or potentiality to act as Thomas puts it. In that sense a relation is brought into reality by both extremes, namely one as the ground and the other as the end. Following his redefinition of ‘relation’, Eckhart modifies the

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<sup>351</sup> In his commentary on *Exodus* Eckhart further ponders upon the concept of relation and the question concerning the two categories – substance and relation in the Godhead. See Eckhart, *In Ex.* nn.62-72 (LW II 66,14-75,15) (trans. Bernard McGinn in trans. Bernard McGinn in *Meister Eckhart: Teacher and Preacher*, New Jersey, 1986, 64-7. It will be abridged as *Teacher and Preacher*).

<sup>352</sup> It is beyond the scope of this study to develop a full discussion of Eckhart’s notion of ‘relation’. Here I simply mention the difference between Thomas’s ‘proportion’ and Eckhart’s ‘relation’, so as to reveal the mode of thinking underlying the two different approaches to God in Thomas and in Eckhart. Clearly Eckhart’s notion of ‘relation’ holds the key to his revolutionary understanding of the divine Trinity and creation. Markus Vinzent, following his discovery of the four new Parisian Questions, tackles the intriguing question surrounding Eckhart’s unconventional understanding of ‘relation’ and his thought regarding the transcendental essence in Trinity. For details, see Markus Vinzent, *The Art of Detachment* (2011), 5-27.

<sup>353</sup> Aristotle, *Categories* I, vi.

<sup>354</sup> Eckhart, the third newly rediscovered *Parisian Question*, *Quaestio Par. Nov. III*: ‘Utrum diversitas esset realis vel rationis’, in *Magistri Eckhardi: Quaestiones Parisienses Supplementum* (2011), 466-8.

meaning of ‘dependence’ or ‘coexistence’, which is usually employed to explain the relation of creator to creature and the relation of the divine persons in the Godhead. Eckhart affirms his impression that a real relation must be grounded in substance; if we take dependence as a kind of relation, yet treat it in the way an effect is linked with its cause, it follows that there would be no real relation in the Godhead, nor will there be a real relation between God and the world. This is because a real relation follows the nature of a thing, not an intellectual order; although identity of something with itself is a rational one, the identity between two substances is something else.<sup>355</sup>

On the basis of a relation that is grounded in substance, Eckhart allows an essential similarity and reversibility between God and the world, since the divine intellect and the created world form a real relation. So far as a real relation is concerned, the divine essence and the world as two extremes of the same relation can be found in each other. Hence the divine intellect is in every thing in the sense of the superior in the inferior, not in terms of proportion or degree, but in terms of fullness and entirety. Through his nuanced expounding of relation, Eckhart replaces the kind of hierarchical and proportioned resemblance between God and the world as stated in Thomas.

Cross-reading between *Parisian Question 1* and the third newly re-discovered *Question*, one will find that in Eckhart our knowledge of things, irrespective of having a fundamental difference from the knowledge of God, is nevertheless an understanding of the divine, because the created things are not deprived of the divine nature, as the above technical proof has demonstrated. Eckhart maintains that ‘knowledge entails two real [aspects], quality and real relatedness’.<sup>356</sup> It follows that human knowledge of things, so long as it takes both quality and real relatedness into consideration, should be credited with a divine nature; hence the unity of the divine essence is seen in the diversity of things, and the divine intellect is discovered in every thing. In his *Prologue to the Book of Propositions* Eckhart clarifies the first and universal cause of all things which give rise to existence from the secondary causes which give rise to *this* existence.<sup>357</sup> In his commentary on *the Book of Wisdom*, Eckhart claims everything created is in some way one, equal and indistinct, because God the Creator affects everything created by his unity, his equality and his indistinction.<sup>358</sup>

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<sup>355</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>357</sup> Eckhart, *Prologus in Opus Propositionum* n.11 (LW I 1, 171,11-172,1) (trans. Armand A. Maurer in *Parisian Questions and Prologues*, 1974, 97).

<sup>358</sup> Eckhart, *In Sap.* n.39 (LW II 360) (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Teacher and Preacher*, 1986, 155).

#### **2.1.2.5 Divine Intellect and Human Intellect as Being One Intellect**

By refuting Thomas's view concerning a proportion of the creature to God, Eckhart also puts into question the Thomistic impression as to the circumscription of the human intellect and our knowledge of the divine in this life. In *Summa Theologica*, I, q.12, a.4, Thomas explains a fundamental difference between sense and intellect. According to Thomas, sense and intellect as two cognitive powers in human soul, align with two different modes of knowing: sense is the act of a corporeal organ and only knows the singular, whereas intellect can abstract the universals from the particular objects. Although intellect in us does not function on account of a particular corporeal organ, it still differs from the angelic intellect as the latter naturally knows natures that are not in matter. Thomas makes it clear that the capacity of the angelic intellect is 'beyond the power of the intellect of our soul in the state of its present life, united as it is to the body'.<sup>359</sup>

In Thomas the divine intellect is differentiated from the created intellect, which includes the angelic intellect and the human intellect. He affirms the point that to know self-subsistent being is natural to the divine intellect alone, which is beyond the natural power of any created intellect.<sup>360</sup> Following the scriptural reference 'Who makes his angels spirits', Thomas defines angels as incorporeal creatures (*Ps.* 103:4), in the sense that angels are incorporeal beings in nature, but nevertheless they are confined to the sphere of creatures. He also calls them the infinite creature in the sense that an angel is not to be received in any matter, thus is infinite from below; and receives its being from above, hence remains finite from above.<sup>361</sup> As for the nature of the angelic intellect, Thomas holds that angels, as the created incorporeal beings, are endowed with the ability to first and principally understand immaterial things. Knowledge is not generated in the angels, but is present naturally. Hence the distinction between an active and a passive intellect is not seen in angels.<sup>362</sup> As angels do not have physical body as we do, it follows that the angelic intellect, unlike the human intellect, does not form a direct linkage with the power of senses.

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<sup>359</sup> Thomas, *Summa Theol.*, I, q.12, a.4.

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>361</sup> Thomas, *Summa Theol.*, I, q.50, a.2. In q.50, a.5 Thomas asserts that the angels are incorruptible by their nature, as a result of their immateriality. A token of this incorruptibility can be gathered from their intellectual operation.

<sup>362</sup> Thomas *Summa Theol.*, I, q.54, a.4.

Thomas makes a distinction between the passive intellect and the active intellect in us and also expounds the necessity for such a distinction. According to Thomas, the reason for admitting a passive intellect in us lies in the fact that we understand sometimes only in potentiality, not actually. And the necessity for admitting an active intellect is due to the potential intelligibility of the material things. Thomas argues that since the material things known by us are only intelligible in potentiality so long as they are outside the soul, it follows that there should be some power capable of rendering to such natures actual intelligibility, and this power in us is called the active intellect.<sup>363</sup>

Admittedly, throughout his *Parisian Questions* Eckhart shows little interest in differentiating the divine intellect from the created intellect, nor does he pay much attention to the difference between the angelic intellect and the human intellect. Eckhart focuses on the nature of intellect *per se*, as he sees the divine intellect and the human intellect as being one intellect. A relatively more explicit and systematic expounding of the concept of intellect is seen in *Parisian Question 2*,<sup>364</sup> in which Eckhart provides a scholastic proof rendered in purely philosophical terms. After a brief introduction to Thomas's view, he moves on to his eleven 'other ways' to support his answer, which can be summarised into five points as follows.

First, Eckhart defines intellect as a natural power of the soul. Insofar as it is a natural power, it is neither here, nor now, nor some definite thing, thus does not fall into a definite species and genus. Because every being or existence is in a definite genus and species, it follows that intellect is not a being, nor does it have an existence.

Second, power and action have their existence from their object. Both intellect as a natural power of the soul, and understanding as the action of the intellect, have their existence from their object.

Third, a cognitive likeness, as the principle of the operation of the senses and intellect, is in no sense a being. Eckhart expounds this from three aspects: 1) a cognitive likeness is no more than a being in the mind, but a being in the mind is not a being in the proper sense, according to Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, for a being in the mind is contrary to the being divided into the ten categories, and also to substance and accident; 2) a cognitive likeness has an object but not a subject; for the soul, or more precisely, the intellective part of the soul, is the *place* not the *subject* in which a cognitive likeness resides; 3) a

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<sup>363</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>364</sup> Eckhart, *Quaest. Par. II* nn.1-10 (LW V 49,5-54,6), (trans. Armand A. Maurer in *Parisian Questions and Prologues*, 1974, 51-4).

cognitive likeness serves the purpose of representing something to the intellect; it would be distracted from its representative function if it were a being.

Fourth, a being is some definite thing. Both a universal and the act of understanding through which a universal is produced are something indeterminate; hence neither a universal nor the act of understanding is a being.

Finally, Eckhart recalls the last point he makes in *Parisian Question 1*, that the nature of being is on a lower level than its cause, which is God, but is on a higher level than what is caused by being, which is human knowledge. In accordance with the principle of causality, what is caused is not the same as cause *per se*, therefore God is not the same as existence because he is the cause of it; likewise existence or being is not the same as our knowledge because the latter is caused by the former. Hence our knowledge does not have existence, it tends toward non-being.

Eckhart allows himself to fall back on Aristotle to the extent that Aristotle is treated as the exclusive authority in his reasoning; no one but Aristotle is repeatedly quoted, in particular his *Metaphysics* and *De Anima*. The metaphysical categories in Aristotle are widely employed by Eckhart in *Parisian Question 2*; the philosophical presentation runs on its own account without being interrupted or reinforced by a single quotation of the scriptural texts. Throughout all the arguments presented here, Eckhart shows no intention to give a separate treatment of the angelic intellect, nor does he endeavour to establish a definition of angels different from that of Thomas in *Summa Theologica* (I, q.50). The reason may lie in the fact that Eckhart sees no fundamental difference between a human being and an angel so far as intellect is concerned; probably he follows Gregory and believes that ‘man senses in common with the brutes, and understands with the angels’.<sup>365</sup>

A cross-reading of Eckhart’s and Thomas’s expositions on this topic suggests that Eckhart does not concern himself with the difference between the divine intellect and the created intellect, nor does he admit the distinction between the passive and active intellect in us. Moreover, the superiority of the angelic intellect over the human intellect is not even mentioned in a disputed question like *Parisian Question 2*, which concerns precisely the existence and knowing of the angels. The focus of Eckhart’s arguments is persistently fixed on the nature of intellect, which can be applied to both the human and

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<sup>365</sup> Thomas, *Summa Theol.*, I, q.54, a.5.

the angelic intellect. He is far more concerned with the nature of intellect in general than with the characteristics that are peculiar to the angelic intellect.

It becomes clear that despite the fact that, in *Parisian Questions* 1 and 2, Eckhart admits a radical difference between human knowledge of things and the knowledge of God on account of the mode of causality, in the sense that the divine knowledge is prior to things and is the cause of things whereas our knowledge (of things) is posterior to things and is caused by things, with his innovative notion of relation he seems to open up to the possibility that the divine nature can be possessed by the created things. Just as he sees the divine essence as the ground that holds God and the world together as two extremes in one relation, Eckhart takes the divine intellect and the human intellect as being fundamentally one intellect, and this is the very point where he deviates from Thomas. So far as the topic of intellect is concerned, the core of his arguments as unfolded in the scholastic *Quaestiones* lies in the nature of intellect, which gives a hint as to the unity of the human intellect and the divine intellect. Evidently Eckhart's exposition of the intellect does not end with a clear distinction between the divine intellect and the created intellect, nor is the superiority of the angelic intellect over the human intellect stressed. On the contrary, he seems to have deliberately omitted the discussion over the distinction between the three, and persistently fixes the attention on the universal nature of intellect, be it possessed by the divine, an angel or a human being. Nevertheless, this does not contradict an acknowledgement of the difference between the three, as touched upon in his scriptural commentaries.

## **2.2 Eckhart the Theologian: Probing the Concept of the Human Intellect through Scriptural Commentaries**

In comparison with the *quaestiones*, where scripture is quoted only infrequently, Eckhart's commentaries entail a closer dialogue with the scriptural texts. His commentary writing covers both the Old and the New Testaments,<sup>366</sup> comprising his *Commentary on Genesis* (two), and *Commentaries on Exodus, Ecclesiasticus, Wisdom and John*. Instead of writing a line-by-line commentary, he picks certain parts from

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<sup>366</sup> Eckhart is among those who conduct speculative theology and also engage in composing biblical commentaries, according to the observation of William J. Courtenay, see note 286.

each of these scriptural texts, and among the chosen texts some verses are treated separately, which gives rise to his *Book of Sermons* in Latin.<sup>367</sup>

In contrast to Thomas's encyclopaedic style, Eckhart deliberately refrains from writing long-winged commentary. He starts his *Opus Tripartitum* with the *General Prologue*, in which he particularly defines the scope and purpose that apply to all his three works, namely propositions, questions and commentaries. Eckhart makes it clear that all of these compositions are intended to meet the demands of certain zealous brethren. Having been deeply stimulated and inspired, they have urged Eckhart to put down in writing what they have heard from him, for in their view what Eckhart has said is rarely heard elsewhere. In response to their request, Eckhart narrows his commentary down to those unusual statements which his zealous brethren do not recall having read or heard elsewhere. Throughout the *Opus Tripartitum* Eckhart maintains his focus on the novel and unusual topics, because he, like those curious brethren, believes that the novel and unusual topics will do a better job than the ordinary ones in stimulating the mind, although the latter could be more valuable and important.<sup>368</sup>

Clearly the novel and unusual topics that Eckhart intends to bring forward can only be appreciated by those who have received professional training in the ordinary topics and have also acquired familiarity with the conventional ways in which these topics are being discussed. In other words, Eckhart's commentary is intended to stimulate an inquisitive mind and to deepen his or her understanding of a familiar topic. Eckhart's commentary is not fitting for an amateur, nor is it a textbook for one to commence theological speculation. He is fully aware that his unconventional style will not be easily accepted; what he says may appear 'strange, doubtful or false' at first sight. However, those seemingly 'strange, doubtful or false' items from his propositions, questions and commentaries will be judged otherwise if they are examined 'in a more learned and intelligent way'. In his commentary Eckhart attempts to demonstrate how these statements are fully substantiated by sacred scripture itself, and also supported by the words of the past saints and illustrious masters.<sup>369</sup>

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<sup>367</sup> In his *General Prologue*, Eckhart restricts his commentary on certain texts of the two Testaments, among which he gives more detailed treatment to some verses, as it seems proper to him to comment on them separately, and to call this the *Book of Sermons* (n.6 [LW I 1, 151,7-10], trans. Armand A. Maurer in *Parisian Questions and Prologues*, 1974, 81-2).

<sup>368</sup> Eckhart, *Prologus generalis in Opus Tripartitum* n.2 (LW I 1, 149,1-2) (trans. Armand A. Maurer in *Parisian Questions and Prologues*, 1974, 80).

<sup>369</sup> Eckhart, *Prologus generalis in Opus Tripartitum* n.7 (LW I 1, 152,5-7) (trans. Armand A. Maurer in *Parisian Questions and Prologues*, 1974, 82).

In addition to the *General Prologue* to all his works, Eckhart writes a prologue to each specific scriptural text before making comment on it. These prologues echo each other, and from them we may elicit some hermeneutical rules that Eckhart follows in his commentary writing. We will look first at the hermeneutical rules that are essential for a proper understanding of Eckhart, and then examine the detailed expositions that he puts forward in the form of commentary with respect to the notion of intellect, in particular, the human intellect.

### **2.2.1 The Genre of Commentary and the Hermeneutical Rules Followed by Eckhart**

Before looking at the specific rules that Eckhart set for his commentary writing, it is necessary to glimpse the scholastic background against which his commentary stands.

#### **2.2.1.1 The Scholastic Background**

It is almost impossible to overestimate the importance of scriptures to the formation and development of a tradition. Indeed, one may even consider that a tradition is nothing but the history of the interpretation of a foundational text or a set of foundational texts, because traditions actually develop around texts that have acquired such authoritative status as to become foundational. This statement can be historically backed up by various world traditions. For instance, the tradition in ancient Greece developed around Homer; that in Judaism around the Torah; in Christianity around the Bible; in Islam around the Qur'an. Even the political tradition of modern America is, in many ways, centred on the Constitution.<sup>370</sup>

These fundamental texts, especially the sacred scriptures of different religions, did not initially appear in the form of systematic discourse. They usually took a narrative form; in other words, the religious texts that are today deemed sacred scriptures emerged as stories rather than systems. Of course, as has been shown by scholarship, the narrative form of the two Testaments does not exclude elements of teaching or doctrine; for example the Ten Commandments in the Old Testament and the *Gospel according to John* in the New Testament, which already sees a theological reflection on the Saviour. Nonetheless, neither Testament constitutes anything like a theological 'system' or synthesis. Yet while the sacred scripture itself is fundamentally narrative in

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<sup>370</sup> Philipp W. Rosemann, *Peter Lombard* (Oxford and New York, 2004), 8.



structure, that narrative form actually encourages theological reflection, which is to penetrate faith by means of reason.

This kind of intellectual penetration of the faith had started early in Christianity, and the legitimacy of using non-Christian concepts and ideas was formally established by Augustine. In his *On Christian Doctrine* Augustine makes it clear that it is perfectly justified for a Christian scholar to apply the pagan philosophy to his study of the scriptures.<sup>371</sup> The Christian tradition, as other religious traditions, is based upon its fundamental texts, the Old and New Testaments, and from the initial narrative form of the original texts arise a wide range of interpretations as systematic theological reflection upon the faith proclaimed by the divinely inspired scriptures. That process indicates an intellectual development from story to system. In fact, the kind of intellectual penetration of the faith, systematisation of the scriptural texts and dialogue with non-Christian thought had been attempted by Christian fathers in antiquity, showing that the seeds of what Martin Grabmann called the scholastic method,<sup>372</sup> which is usually associated with the name of Thomas Aquinas, had been planted long before the Middle Ages.<sup>373</sup>

The evolution from story to system begins when a narrative is reflected and interpreted; this interpretation of a divinely inspired text gives rise to a system, namely theology.<sup>374</sup> The holy scriptures may possess the power to determine the fundamental character of Christianity, but it is the continuing interpretation of them that allows the Christian tradition to be preserved and developed. A direct interpretation of the original scriptural texts gives rise to a commentary, which serves mainly to clarify the meaning of the words contained in the scriptures.<sup>375</sup> In that sense commentary acquires more

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<sup>371</sup> See St. Augustine *De doctrina Christiana*, 2. 144-8. This line of thought was well received in the context of medieval scholastic theology.

<sup>372</sup> Martin Grabmann in 1909 defined scholasticism as follows: 'the scholastic method intends to gain as much insight as possible into the contents of the faith through the application of reason and philosophy to the truths of revelation, so as to bring supernatural truth closer to the human mind which reflects on it, to make possible a systematic, organically structured general presentation of the truth about salvation, and to be able to answer reasonably the objections raised against the contents of revelation' (Grabmann, *Geschichte* 1:36-37; see also Quinto, *Scholastica*, 339-49). Quoted from Ulrich G Leinsle, *Introduction to Scholastic Theology*, trans. by Michael J. Miller (Washington, D.C., 2010), 5.

<sup>373</sup> For a detailed exposition, see Philipp W. Rosemann, *Peter Lombard* (2004), 8-33.

<sup>374</sup> The development from a story or even a myth to a systematic interpretation has been explored from a modern hermeneutical perspective, as illustrated in Paul Ricoeur's study of psychoanalysis and structuralism, which culminated in a collection of his essays: *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics* (Evanston, 1974).

<sup>375</sup> James M. Robinson offers a concise and clear introduction to the development of hermeneutics in Christian tradition alongside biblical studies; see James M. Robinson and John B Cobb (eds.), *The New Hermeneutic* (New York, Evanston and London, 1964), ch. 1, 'Hermeneutic since Barth', 1-77.

significance than other literary forms in shaping a religious tradition, due to its direct connection to the fundamental texts.

The form of commentary entails an individual's unique dialogue with a scripture. Hence the practice of commentary writing lies at the heart of biblical studies, as it suggests the means by which a religious tradition is to be received and conceived anew in an individual mind. As a text is always open to new understanding and thus to new interpretation, different commentaries based on the same text can arise at the same time and possibly be justified according to the same standard.

Hermeneutics as the art of interpretation or understanding has occupied the minds of Christian scholars since the very beginning of Christian history. As early as the third century four possible modes of scriptural exegesis were proposed, namely the literal; moral; allegorical or mystical, in which the Old Testament is interpreted as a prefiguring of the New Testament; and the anagogical or revelatory mode. These became the four guidelines for commentary writing throughout the medieval period.<sup>376</sup> By the twelfth century students of biblical exegesis usually resorted to the *Glossa Ordinaria*, which became the standard medieval corpus of biblical glosses, providing commentaries on a high proportion of verses in the Vulgate Bible. The authors of the glosses include Origen, Augustine, John Chrysostom, Jerome, Ambrose, and Gregory the Great, among whom the most frequently quoted is Augustine. It is worth noting that most of the commentaries dwell on only one of the four levels of figurative meaning of a word, phrase, or verse.<sup>377</sup>

In addition to Augustine, Boethius represents another important influence on the medieval intellectual activity. In his *On the Consolation of Philosophy* (*De Consolatione Philosophiae*) Boethius regards *Philosophia* as the 'guide of reason', and maintains that this unemotional intellectual guide should be followed by all. In his view, faith should rest with reason. Emotion is depicted as a distraction whose dominance must be suppressed, so as to allow reason to achieve a level of control in the individual. In his *On the Trinity* (*De Trinitate*), Boethius claims that 'it is the mark of an educated person to attempt to grasp each thing as it is, and thus to hold a belief about it'.<sup>378</sup> On this account he makes the three speculative divisions, namely physics, mathematics and theology. Each deals with different objects. Physics is proper to that which is in motion

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<sup>376</sup> B.B. Price, *Medieval Thought: An Introduction*, (Oxford and Cambridge MA, 1992), 60.

<sup>377</sup> B.B. Price, *Medieval Thought: An Introduction* (1992), 229-30.

<sup>378</sup> Boethius, *On the Trinity*, II, 168.60.

and not abstract; mathematics to that which is not in motion and not abstract; theology alone deals with the abstract, which is not in motion and is separable, in other words, the subject of theology is the substance of God, which lacks both motion and matter. Consequently each of the three divisions calls for a specific approach suitable to the nature of the relevant subject. For instance, one should engage in physics rationally, in mathematics in a disciplined manner, and in the study of the divine matter in an intellectual manner.<sup>379</sup> Boethius also made an ambitious attempt to translate the work of the Greek philosophers into Latin, although that plan did not come to fruition. His unique contribution to the education of the liberal arts is particularly worth mentioning here. Boethius embarked upon an immensely stimulating project of writing textbooks for each of the arts of the *quadrivium*: *On Arithmetic* (*De arithmetica*); *On Geometry* (*De geometrica*); *On Music* (*De musica*) and *On Astronomy* (*De astronomia*). His textbooks proved to be pedagogical milestones and formed the core of the liberal arts curriculum throughout the twelfth century.<sup>380</sup>

The systematic introduction of Aristotle's works to the Latin world in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, partly through the Arabic scholars' commentaries and translations of the Greek philosophy, finally triggered the rise of the scholastic movement in Christian theology that culminated in Thomas. Thomas defines theology as the divine science whose truth is to be demonstrated by natural reason. In the first question of his *Summa Theologica* Thomas claims that 'there is a God needs proof'.<sup>381</sup> In other words, faith seeks understanding, and revelation is open to reasoning. This fundamental axiom of the scholastic theology represents a striking contrast to that kind of esotericism according to which human language and reason is ultimately a perversion of the Word of God. It was taken for granted by the medieval mind that the revelatory truth contained in the holy scriptures does not prohibit, but in fact calls for, a clear, logical and orderly demonstration in the light of the natural reason. Thus despite the differences and disagreements between theologians of diverse backgrounds, a common understanding was shared by all the masters and students in the Middle Ages, one that is expressed through a persistent zeal and a profound sense of respect for clarity and order. The

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<sup>379</sup> Following the three methods appropriate to the three different subjects, Boethius continues, 'it is also fitting not to be drawn aside towards images, but rather to contemplate that form which is truly form and not image, and which is being itself as well as that from which being it' (Boethius, *On the Trinity*, II. 169.80).

<sup>380</sup> B.B. Price particularly addresses this point in his *Medieval Thought: An Introduction* (1992), 63-5.

<sup>381</sup> Thomas, *Summa Theol.*, I, q.1.

emphasis on clarity of expression and orderly procedure reveals the mould of the scholastic mind, one in full accordance with the notion that it is a theologian's duty to strive for clarity of thought and expression regardless of one's spiritual achievement.

Generally speaking, the task of scholastic theology is fixed on demonstrating a set of logically sound 'proofs' for the Christian faith. The scholastic authors set up a rigid academic standard that calls for a command of Aristotelian and Platonic (including Neoplatonic) concepts of grammar and logic, in particular Aristotle's syllogism; and of the works of the antecedent Greek and Latin fathers. This standard can be universally applied to all sorts of theological compositions, and is taken up most seriously in the writing of commentary, especially the commentary on scriptures. Therefore, the privilege of writing commentary on the sacred texts was strictly reserved for a qualified master in his maturity.<sup>382</sup>

The scholastic commentary shows a marked distinction from the patristic and monastic commentaries. We cannot probe here into the details concerning the differences among these three; for the present study it is necessary to say only that scholastic commentary fixes itself upon the rational demonstration of the divine truth contained in the sacred texts, and on that basis the expression of personal piety is superseded by a rigorous logical demonstration of the divine truth. A glimpse of the academic training in the medieval universities, in particular Paris and Oxford, may help to illustrate this. All students, before being admitted to the faculty of theology, were required to receive the preparatory training in the liberal arts, the *trivium* (grammar, rhetoric and logic) and *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy). Evidently only one who had been well trained in grammar and logic would be considered qualified to take up the study of theology, an indication that the learning of scripture would inevitably be loaded with grammatical analysis and logical

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<sup>382</sup> Academic training in theology was a long process in the Middle Ages. Theology students usually started with the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard (d. 1160), the official theological handbook at that time. Having listened to others for some years, they were allowed to comment on the *Sentences* and thus obtained the degree of bachelor, to be precise, '*bachelarius Sententiarum*' ('Bachelor of the *Sentences*'). Lombard's *Sentences* was chosen as the appropriate first textbook for all theology students, as it provided a systematic collection of the Patristic teachings of the Greek and Latin fathers, arranged in four books following the order of the Apostles' Creed. Through this training, a student would acquire the ability to appreciate the technique employed by a master in his scholastic works. A table showing a student's career at university is given in John Marenbon, *Later Medieval Philosophy (1150-1350): An Introduction* (London and New York, 1987), 21-2.

inference.<sup>383</sup> In fact, so essential was the study of grammar and logic to scholastic learning, that textbooks such as the *Grammar* of Priscian and the *Summulae Logicales* of Peter of Spain were treated as canonical texts, thoroughly studied and widely commented by medieval scholars. Sitting in the scholastic tradition, the knowledge of grammar and logic provided one with efficient instruments for biblical studies in terms of reading and interpreting scriptures.

Following on from the continuous translation of Aristotle's works into Latin, the so-called *Logica nova* (new logic) emerged around the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, in addition to the existing *Logica vetus* (old logic).<sup>384</sup> Meanwhile Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and *Libri Naturales* were introduced into the universities. As a result Greek philosophy was embraced and known in depth and detail by arts masters and theologians alike, and metaphysical questioning was thus integrated into theological speculation.

Overall the crucial role of grammar, logic and philosophy in scholastic learning brought about an unprecedented rigorous standard for academic research<sup>385</sup> at the medieval universities. Aristotle's definition of science was adopted by all the subjects taught at university; thus theology was crowned as the science of the divine, and the study of theology was not to be exempt from the normative standard for scientific research. As a result, logical demonstration and syllogistic argumentation formed the core of scholastic theology, which was expressed chiefly through *quaestiones*. It is worth mentioning that from the middle of the 12<sup>th</sup> century onwards Aristotle's *De Sophisticis Elenchis* was thoroughly studied and enjoyed increasing popularity. This treatise on fallacies certainly met the demands of the *quaestio* technique, as it provided the students and masters at the faculty of theology with the method for detecting and refuting fallacious arguments. It is also notable that the *quaestio* technique gave impetus

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<sup>383</sup> Thomas expounds the four senses a word in the Holy Scripture may have. First and foremost is the literal sense; on the basis of the literal sense arises the spiritual sense, which is threefold: moral, allegorical and anagogical. Thomas also touches on a further, parabolical, sense, but he gives no further exposition on this. See *Summa Theol.*, I, q.1, a.10.

<sup>384</sup> The so-called 'new logic' comprises Aristotle's four logical works: *Prior Analytics*, *De Sophisticis Elenchis*, *Topics* and *Posterior Analytics*, while the 'old logic' refers to the texts previously available to the Latin world, including Aristotle's *Categories* and *De Interpretatione*, Porphyry's *Isagoge*, as well as Boethius's *Commentaries* on *Isagoge*, *Categories* and *De Interpretatione* and his treatise on topical argumentation *De topicis differentiis*.

<sup>385</sup> Medieval scholars' expertise in linguistic analysis has not been fully realised by contemporary studies in logic and philosophy. Desmond Paul Henry sharply points out that the cognate techniques such as linguistically analytic philosophising, which has been pronounced a characteristic product of twentieth-century bourgeois society, and the grammar of 'deep structure', which has been deemed a novelty originating in the seventeenth century, were perfectly familiar to medieval scholars. See Desmond Paul Henry, *That Most Subtle Question (Quaestio Subtillissima: The Metaphysical Bearing of Medieval and Contemporary Linguistic Disciplines)* (Manchester, 1984), vii.

to the commentary writing of a scholastic theologian like Eckhart. Although scriptural commentaries appear never to be as argumentative as disputed *quaestiones*, a scholastic commentator implicitly encloses a debate within his commentary by alluding to the opinion that he intends to refute. Similarly, the technique of syllogistic reasoning, which plays a predominant role in the writing of *quaestiones*, is not excluded from the writing of scriptural commentary.

Of course, the techniques involved in formulating the scholastic *quaestiones* also penetrate the writing of scholastic commentaries. Commentary on scriptures is expected to attain to the level of scientific research, hence the striving for objectivity and universality is manifest in theology as it is in secular studies. In that sense the Holy Bible should be studied as it is, and the commentary on a scriptural text ought to clarify and disclose the objective, literal meaning of scripture itself. It is understandable that a scholastic commentator would no longer be content with an unproven claim charged with personal emotion and apologetic enthusiasm. Instead, he will conscientiously concentrate on the literal meaning of the sacred texts. The exclusive task of the scholastic commentary is to reveal, as clearly as possible, what the authors of the scriptures intend to say. Thus the more objective and invisible the commentator is, the better his commentary will become. Considering the biblical education occurring in the schools of Paris and elsewhere, the main purpose of the scholastic commentary is to sharpen the minds of the students by providing them with the objective meaning of the scriptural texts. It aims to deepen the reader's understanding of the sacred texts, rather than to arouse piety in him. The scholastic approach to scripture in general differs from the principle Augustine advocates in his *On Christian Doctrine*, in which he forcefully emphasises the priority of faith and takes faith as the ground for a proper understanding of scripture. To Augustine the pursuit of knowledge is prone to arousing arrogance in the knower if his mind is not firmly rooted in faith. He thus lays down a rule concerning scriptural reading: 'When he [the reader] is meek and lowly of heart, subject to the easy yoke of Christ, and loaded with his light burden, rooted and grounded and built up in faith, so that knowledge cannot puff him up, let him then approach the consideration and discussion of ambiguous signs in scripture.'<sup>386</sup> Augustine's deep concern about the potentially detrimental effect of knowledge is not necessarily shared by a medieval

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<sup>386</sup> Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, II, XII, 17.

scholastic, and neither is his optative or even imperative tone. In contrast to the homiletic and pastoral style of the patristic and monastic commentaries, scholastic commentary makes more room for rational demonstration, using a language often dominated by the propositional form, and whatever tends towards unction, colloquialism or informality will be skilfully withdrawn from consideration.

In that sense, the scholastic commentator is more cautious about his personal interference with the literal meaning of the scriptures. Indeed, a commentator must shed some personal light on a transmitted text whilst composing a commentary on it, that personal light only shines out when the commentator delves into the depth of the scripture and brings out the best of it. Therefore, commentary is fundamentally an expression of the commentator's discovery of what has been hidden deep within the sacred texts; his intellectual output is strictly confined to the domain of such objective 'discovery', and should never become a manifestation of his free 'creation'.

Clearly this sort of scholastic analysis of the scriptural texts attaches most importance to the literal meaning of scripture, which refers to the intention of the author of the Holy Scripture – God. Although the literal sense points directly towards what is intended by the author, this does not mean that the words in the holy scripture can be taken only in the literal sense. Because God, unlike the human author of a secular text, comprehends all things by his intellect in one act, it follows that even according to the literal meaning, it is not unfitting to recognise that one word in a scripture may be understood in several senses. In *Summa Theologica* (I, q.1, a.10) Thomas resorts to Augustine (*Confession* 12.31.42) to justify the multiple senses of the words in the scriptures. On that basis Thomas makes a distinction between the literal sense and the spiritual sense, and insists that the literal sense is one, a word signifies one thing, and that thing could have further signification if God so intended. Thomas gives a full exposition of the relation between the literal sense and the spiritual sense. From his perspective, the spiritual sense must be entirely based on and derived from the literal sense. He further explains the fundamental difference between the divine author and the human author, claiming that: 'The author of Holy Scripture is God, in whose power it is to signify his meaning, not by words only (as man also can do), but also by things themselves.'<sup>387</sup> On this ground, Thomas points out the distinctive character which distinguishes theology from every other science with regard to the word and its signification. According to Thomas, the

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<sup>387</sup> *Ibid.*

spiritual sense that is deemed the enlargement or extension of the literal sense ought to be strictly reserved for the words contained in the holy scripture; the co-existence of the spiritual and literal senses applies only to the divine, and no other science apart from theology – the science of the divine – is proper to this hermeneutical principle. God alone, as the author of the Holy Bible and the creator of all things, is entitled to make one thing serve as the symbol that signifies another reality. In other words, only the Bible enjoys the spiritual sense, and as the reader we can never take one thing as the symbol of another unless we are so informed in the literal sense. The spiritual sense is threefold, namely the allegorical, the moral, and the anagogical.

Such a scholastic stance as expressed by Thomas clearly gives priority to the literal meaning and conscientiously redefines the scope of it. Although both Thomas and Augustine take the literal meaning of a word as what is intended by the author, in Augustine the term ‘literal’ is taken in a broader sense; when the author is God, who in his intellect comprehends all things, the literal sense of a word could become multiple. To Thomas one word has only one literal meaning, the stance as to the multiplicity of literal senses is to be abandoned entirely. After Thomas, Eckhart seems to stand closer to Augustine when he attempts to unite the literal sense with the spiritual sense, as will be discussed later.

Thomas’s scholastic works cover a wide spectrum. In addition to *De Veritate* and *Summa Theologica*, which are formulated in the form of *quaestiones*, Thomas also composed a series of scriptural commentaries; for example his *Catena Aurea* or *Golden Chain* provides a continuous gloss on the four gospels, in which the Latin and Greek Fathers are collocated. Taking Thomas’s *Golden Chain* as an example, it is plain that the scholastic commentary, despite an unprecedented emphasis on the literal meaning of scripture, still fulfils the duty of preserving the continuity of Christian tradition, as it is seen that at least in Thomas the patristic thinking forms an integral part of his scholastic commentary. While it is hard to discern to what extent Thomas’s *Golden Chain* has influenced Eckhart’s commentary writing, it is clear that at least some of Eckhart’s commentaries, such as his *Commentary on the Lord’s Prayer* as shown by recently published studies,<sup>388</sup> are closely based on this work. To that extent, we may conclude that Eckhart follows in the footsteps of Thomas and the church fathers in his

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<sup>388</sup> For a detailed comparison of the two texts, see Markus Vinzent, *Meister Eckhart, On the Lord’s Prayer* (Leuven, 2012), 21-81.



commentary writing, and deliberately merges his thought into the longstanding tradition of biblical study. In comparison with his *Parisian Questions*, Eckhart's scriptural commentaries entail a broader horizon, partly due to the objective criterion of the form of commentary, and more importantly due to his own attempt to incorporate the whole tradition into his rich and exhaustive exegeses on some of the most well-known scriptural texts or verses.

#### **2.2.1.2 The Specific Hermeneutical Rules Followed by Eckhart's Commentary**

The unique contribution of Eckhart's commentary to the scholastic tradition would be almost incomprehensible, were the continuity between Eckhart and Thomas to be neglected. Just as the *Book of Questions* accords with the order of content in the *Summa Theologica*,<sup>389</sup> so Eckhart bears in mind the words of the illustrious and venerable friar Thomas of Aquino whilst composing the *Book of Commentaries*, which constitutes the third book of the *Opus Tripartitum*. Once again Eckhart reminds the reader that the works of the venerable teachers, and particularly Thomas, are not to be neglected.

It is beyond the scope of this research to explore the details regarding the continuation from Thomas to Eckhart, but this issue must be addressed at least briefly before moving on to the specific rules that Eckhart set for his own commentary. Without a general understanding of Thomas, it will be impossible to appreciate Eckhart. What Eckhart means by the 'unusual' or 'novel' bears a particular reference to the Thomistic way of thinking and expressing that seems 'usual' to the masters and students of the day. It is precisely on the basis of a thorough understanding of Thomas that Eckhart manages to find the specific area in which his unique contribution to Christian tradition is to be made.

In order to allow prominence to the most valuable thoughts, Eckhart pays a great deal of attention to economy of language. In each of the prologues to his commentaries Eckhart addresses the importance of brevity. In contrast to the encyclopaedic style of *Summa*, Eckhart narrows his topics down to those that cannot be found elsewhere, so that only the rarest ones are to be preserved.<sup>390</sup> For the sake of brevity he omits a considerable amount of the material from the notes he had written down whilst going

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<sup>389</sup> Eckhart, *Prologus generalis in Opus Tripartitum* n.5 (LW I 1, 151,2-4) (trans. Armand A. Maurer in *Parisian Questions and Prologues*, 1974, 81).

<sup>390</sup> Eckhart, *Prologus generalis in Opus Tripartitum* n.7 (LW I 1, 151,15) (trans. Armand A. Maurer in *Parisian Questions and Prologues*, 1974, 82).

through the Old and the New Testaments. Clearly, Eckhart subjected his work to a thorough process of screening. After initially putting down whatever occurred to him whilst reading the scriptures, including his own interpretations of the scriptural texts on different occasions and the relevant expositions given by the earlier saints and masters, he took great care to filter out whatever seemed unnecessary or repetitive, so that finally only the most valuable interpretations remain to be passed on to the reader.<sup>391</sup>

In the *Prologue* to the *Book of Commentaries* Eckhart makes five points as general guidelines for reading. As a commentator Eckhart conscientiously makes room for the reader to participate in the dialogue with the scriptural texts. Instead of delivering a certain interpretation, Eckhart provides a good variety of expositions concerning the same text, and leaves it to the reader to decide, to judge, and to harmonise them.<sup>392</sup> Eckhart also invites the reader to cross-examine the different passages of the scriptures. In his commentaries it often happens that when one text is to be expounded, many other texts are being cited, so that one passage can be explained by many others and vice versa. For instance, Eckhart's comments on the verse 'In the beginning God created heaven and earth' (*Genesis* 1:1) parallel his comments on the verse 'In the beginning was the Word' (*John* 1:1). If the reader wishes to know more about one cited item, he may find a full exposition in its proper place. In addition, Eckhart emphasises the fact that these passages are often cited with a meaning that goes *beyond* (my italics) the primary meaning of the text. That, however, can be justified by the true and proper sense of the words following the procedure demonstrated by Augustine in his *Confession* XII.<sup>393</sup>

Although Eckhart agrees with Thomas as to the primacy of the literal sense, and insists that the text should always be interpreted literally first, he nevertheless does not follow Thomas so closely with regard to the distinction between the literal and spiritual

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<sup>391</sup> Eckhart, *Prologus in Opus Expositionum I* (LW I 1, 183,3-9) (trans. defense 82. It will be abridged as *Essential Eckhart* in the following footnotes).

<sup>392</sup> For instance, his treatment of the term 'darkness' appeared in *Verse 5 'The Light shines in the darkness, the darkness did not comprehend it'* in *Commentary on John*; here we find the connotations of 'darkness' vary from 'everything that is created' (nn.72-3), to what Thomas and Maimonides mean by 'fire' in the sense that fire does not give light in itself save in foreign material (n.74), with reference to 'Darkness was over the face of the earth' (*Gn.* 1:2). Eckhart also includes the moral implication of 'darkness', which refers to evil that exists in something good (n.75). See Eckhart, *In Ioh.* nn.72-5 (LW III 60,8-63,15), (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 148-50).

<sup>393</sup> Eckhart resorts to Augustine in his *Prologue* to the *Book of Commentaries*; see Eckhart, *Prologus in Opus Expositionum II* n.3 (LW I 1, 184,6-11) (trans. Armand A. Maurer in *Parisian Questions and Prologues*, 1974, 104-5).

senses. Eckhart seems to take an Augustinian stance with regard to the multiplicity of literal senses, which shows a subtle divergence from Thomas.<sup>394</sup> In line with Augustine, Eckhart addresses the same hermeneutic rule in his *Prologue* to the *Book of the Parables of Genesis*,<sup>395</sup> namely, that the meaning that goes *beyond* the primary meaning of the text ought to be justified. He wrote two different versions of *Commentary on Genesis*. The first concentrates on the noteworthy points so far as the ‘more evident sense’ of the book is concerned. In the second, the *Book of the Parables of Genesis*, Eckhart shifts the focus of attention to the ‘more hidden sense’ of the scriptural texts<sup>396</sup> in order to reveal or disclose what is hidden beneath the surface of the literal sense. According to Eckhart, it is absolutely necessary to explore the hidden sense of the words when they are expressed in a parable fashion.<sup>397</sup> This kind of exploration will be intellectually and spiritually rewarding; in his own words: ‘When we can dig out some mystical understanding from what is read it is like bringing honey forth from the hidden depths of the honeycomb.’<sup>398</sup>

By laying more emphasis on the richness of the parables contained in the holy canon, Eckhart somehow loosens the Thomistic definition of the literal sense of a word and blurs the line that Thomas intended to distinguish the literal sense from the spiritual sense. At this point Eckhart is more likely to think in the vein of Augustine on the Platonic ground, in accordance with the axiom that every truth comes from nowhere but the Truth itself.

Based on the Platonic principle, Eckhart puts forward the proposition that every true sense is a literal sense. His arguments proceed as follows: The holy men spoke when being driven by the Holy Spirit (2 P. 1:21) and the Holy Spirit teaches all truth (*Jn.* 16:13); as the literal sense is what the author intends and God is the author of the holy scriptures, it follows that every true sense is a literal sense. As well as citing the

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<sup>394</sup> Bernard McGinn briefly addresses this issue in his translation; see *Essential Eckhart* (1981), note 66, 320.

<sup>395</sup> It is open to dispute whether Eckhart made a radical change in his hermeneutical concerns.

<sup>396</sup> Thomas only mentions the parabolical sense in his arguments; he does not give further explanation as to a proper approach to the parables contained in the scriptures. The parabolic sense is not included in what he means by the threefold spiritual sense: moral, allegorical and anagogical. See *Summa Theol.*, I, q.1, a. 10.

<sup>397</sup> As pointed out by McGinn, the influence of Maimonides on Eckhart is manifest with regard to the inner meaning of scripture. Studies on Eckhart’s hermeneutics have been done by a number of scholars, in particular, E. Winkler, *Exegetische Methoden bei Meister Eckhart* (Tübingen, 1965) and K. Weiss, ‘Meister Eckharts Biblische Hermeneutik’, in *La mystique rhénane* (Paris, 1963), 107-8.

<sup>398</sup> Eckhart, *Prologus in Librum Parabolarum Genesis* n.1 (LW I 1, 448,17-449,1) (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 93).

scriptural texts, Eckhart also falls back on the authority of Augustine, whom he lets speak for him:

As long as anyone in reading the holy scriptures is trying to understand what their author meant to say, what harm is there if he lays hold of something that you, the light of all truthful minds, shows him to be true, even if the author he is reading did not grasp it – though the author did grasp a truth, just not this one?... What harm does it do to me that different meanings can be taken from the same words as long as they are true?<sup>399</sup>

After quoting Augustine's rhetorical question, Eckhart adds one sentence to make it complete:

And true in the single truth of Light?

Here we see a unification of 'the different meanings' of the same words with the 'single truth of Light'. To Eckhart the legitimacy of the multiple meanings of a word can be established in One Truth which is God himself. The words of God can be understood differently so long as the reader is inspired by the divine intellect. The validity of one's understanding of the scripture lies in its conformity to the divine thought, rather than in its conformity to the things.<sup>400</sup> Eckhart's focus is on the source or origin of the truth, which can be nothing but the divine intellect. In that sense Eckhart makes the point that God, who is the real author of the scripture, never fails to renew the meaning of his own words in the intellect of the reader whilst the scripture is assimilated anew. Not only does God allow the Word to be spoken in human language, but he also comprehends, inspires and intends all truth at one time in his intellect.<sup>401</sup> 'This is why Augustine says that he made scripture fruitful in such a way that everything that any intellect could draw from it has been sown in it and sealed upon it.'<sup>402</sup>

Thus the renewal or growth of the meaning of the scripture does not contradict the Truth; on the contrary, it is derived from and rooted in the divine intellect. Eckhart, in line with Augustine, allows the growth of the meaning of the scriptural texts to be

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<sup>399</sup> Augustine, *Confession* 12.18.27, quoted by Eckhart in *Prologus in Librum Parabolarum Genesis* n.2 (LW I 1, 450,1-6) (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 93).

<sup>400</sup> Thomas, *De Veritate*, q.1, a.2: 'Truth is "the conformity of thing and intellect"'. But since this conformity can be only in the intellect, truth is only in the intellect.'

<sup>401</sup> Eckhart quotes only this verse from Thomas's *Summa Theol.* I. q.1, a.10, rather than referring to Thomas's full exposition concerning truth, intellect and things in *De Veritate*, q.1. Eckhart is not so much concerned with the empirical approach as is Thomas. Thomas gives a lengthy discussion on the conformity of things to the intellect; from the conformity between things and intellect arises the question of truth.

<sup>402</sup> Eckhart resorts to Augustine to affirm his view. For Augustine's words, see *Christ. Doct.* 3.27.28.

justified on the intellectual ground. Such a hermeneutic rule encourages the reader to rise above the literal meaning and delve further into the spiritual meaning of the scripture, especially when it comes to the parables.

Insofar as the divine is concerned, the literal sense is no other than the spiritual sense, because whatever is intended by God or preconceived in the divine intellect is always the spiritual truth, be it in the form of natural law, ethical doctrine or parabolical image. Hence a parable speaks the spiritual truth concerning God, nature and ethics to the same extent as other forms of expression. From the viewpoint of the divine, there is no hierarchical distinction between the natural, ethical, and spiritual truths. They all intimately agree with the divine truth so long as they are properly understood. Here Eckhart seems to be in open defiance against the Thomistic view, which stresses the distinction between the literal and the spiritual sense. But a closer scrutiny will show that Eckhart is not simply identifying the literal sense with the spiritual sense, nor does he intend to dissolve the scholastic ground established by Thomas. On the contrary, he is trying to push the scholastic perspective one step further so as to demonstrate that literal sense is fundamentally spiritual sense. But this proposition is based strictly on the scholastic ground in the sense that the identification of the literal and spiritual senses is derived from understanding rather than from faith alone, and can be clearly demonstrated with the aid of the natural reason.

As particularly seen in his *Prologue* to the *Book of the Parables of Genesis*, Eckhart explicitly articulates the necessity to reinstate the spiritual sense at the centre of scriptural learning. But he does so on the basis of the scholastic principle, and his emphasis on the significance of parabolic expressions is mainly due to an intellectual consideration. Eckhart's commentary is intended to arouse deeper understanding of the scripture in the mind of the skilled reader. Using all available means, Eckhart attempts to prove in a sophisticated scholastic manner that it is not idle to say that the Spirit would teach the disciple all truth (*Jn.* 16:13).<sup>403</sup>

Based on the scripture itself, following the Aristotelian theory that truth lies in the intellect rather than in things, and in agreement with both Augustine and Thomas on the point that the true sense of the words of scripture consists in the divine intellect, Eckhart asserts that the divine truth can only be taught by the Holy Spirit, and the truth

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<sup>403</sup> Eckhart, *Prologus in Librum Parabolarum Genesis* n.2 (LW I 1, 452,9-11) (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 94).

that God intends to convey by the scripture would be received and conceived nowhere but in the intellect of the reader with the aid of the Holy Spirit. Hence the reader's understanding of the scripture entails his or her intellectual operation as well as the performance of the Holy Spirit, and on that account the hermeneutical, the intellectual and the spiritual issues become one. This is a significant insight on the part of Eckhart, which has some profound implications: the scripture should be understood rather than merely believed, thus understanding rather than faith is at stake; to understand the scripture means to receive the divine truth in the intellect, thus truth rather than charity, intellect rather than will is to be focused on; and the divine truth is taught by the Holy Spirit, thus the acquisition of truth is no less than the reception of the Spirit. To Eckhart the spiritual issue is radically an intellectual or even hermeneutical matter, and vice versa.

Sitting in the scholastic tradition, Eckhart never gives himself free rein to promote any unproved claim. Despite his identification of the spiritual sense with the literal sense, the intellectual issue with the spiritual issue, Eckhart persistently adheres to the scholastic standard in his practice of commentary writing. That scholastic concern is particularly illustrated in his treatment of the parables in *Genesis*. In his second commentary on *Genesis*, where the significance of the parabolical expression is particularly highlighted, Eckhart insists that his commentary is to be unfolded in a logical procedure, which comprises three steps: 1) The text itself will always be literally interpreted; 2) The things that seem to be hidden in parabolical fashion under the words of each text will be treated in a summary and succinct way; and 3) The nature and properties of the divine, natural or ethical truths contained under the parable or surface of the letter will be explained in a more extensive way.<sup>404</sup> The same principle of exegesis is addressed in his commentary on *Exodus*, where Eckhart claims that 'sacred scripture frequently tells a story in such a way that it also contains and suggests mysteries, teaches about the nature of things, and directs and orders moral actions'.<sup>405</sup> This oft-repeated hermeneutical rule makes plain Eckhart's attempt to ground the natural, moral and theological truths on scripture itself, and on that basis to reveal the agreement between three types of truths. This position has its root in the longstanding tradition of biblical exegesis, as McGinn has pointed out in his summary of Eckhart's

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<sup>404</sup> Eckhart, *Prologus in Librum Parabolarum Genesis* n.7 (LW I 1, 456-1-5) (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 95).

<sup>405</sup> Eckhart, *In Ex.* n.211 (LW II 178,5-7) (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Teacher and Preacher*, 1986, 110).

theology, whereby the division of the inner meaning of scripture into three, namely theological, natural and moral, is nothing innovative, but is a traditional position first seen in Jerome. This relates extensively to the division of science into theological, natural, and moral truth, which probably derives from both the Aristotelian and the Platonic-Stoic traditions, as we see in the former a division of speculative philosophy into physics, mathematics, and theology (*Metaphysics*. 6.1), and in the latter a division among physics, logic and ethics.<sup>406</sup>

Eckhart usually starts his comments with the literal meaning of a scriptural text, and then moves on to the moral, natural and theological implications of it. Throughout his commentaries on both the New and the Old Testaments, Eckhart shows an intention to demonstrate the unity, coherence or even mutual complement between the three layers of truth hidden in scripture. It is worth noting that in his commentaries Eckhart seems deliberately to allow more room for the moral dimension in comparison with the argumentation unfolded in *Parisian Questions*. For instance, in his *Commentary on John*, nn.104-5, Eckhart first expounds the literal meaning of the verse ‘he came to his own’ (*Jn.* 1:11), then turns to the moral meaning of it.<sup>407</sup>

Overall Eckhart ensures that all of the ‘unusual’ or ‘novel’ statements in his works will gain a logical and rational demonstration in accordance with the scholastic standard. This ‘unusual’ or ‘novel’ character of Eckhart’s thinking cannot be understood without referring to the authoritative expositions provided by earlier masters, in particular Thomas, as the theological questions that used to puzzle Thomas continue to preoccupy Eckhart. The continuity between Eckhart and Thomas in both speculative theology and biblical commentary makes it absolutely necessary to cross-read between the two thinkers, if we are to grasp the characteristic of Eckhart’s theological thinking and his unique approach to scripture. We are pressed at some points to form a brief comparison of the two, as shown above concerning the literal meaning of scripture,<sup>408</sup> without which it is hard to comprehend the academic trend in which Eckhart lived and the theological background against which his thought was established. It goes without saying that Eckhart was familiar with the works of Thomas and always bore them in mind whilst

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<sup>406</sup> Bernard McGinn, ‘Theological Summary’, *Essential Eckhart* (1981), 29 and note 26, 299-300.

<sup>407</sup> Eckhart, *In Ioh.* nn.104-5 (LW III 89,12-90,5) (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 162).

<sup>408</sup> For a discussion over some radical differences between Thomas and Eckhart, see Andreas Speer, ‘Are There One or Two Theologies? - A Fundamental Disagreement between Thomas Aquinas and Meister Eckhart’, *Medieval Mystical Theology* 22 (2013), 139-54.

composing his commentary. But it is equally certain that Eckhart has something new to contribute to the same tradition; he is offering a new approach, a new answer to the same question that Thomas had wrestled with in his works, in particular his encyclopaedic *Summa*.

Admittedly an attentive reader may spot elements of arbitrariness in Eckhart, but those seemingly arbitrary judgements and interpretations are derived solely from a creative dialogue with scripture which, in turn, can be justified by Eckhart's broader view of the literal meaning of scripture. Apart from his implicit admission of the multiplicity of the literal sense, Eckhart's theory of predication plays another crucial part in his exegetical works, which indicates a distinctive mark of Neoplatonic influence, mainly from the Jewish scholar Maimonides, and also suggests a divergence between the Eckhartian and the Thomistic ways of thinking and speaking.

The quest for the most appropriate way to predicate the ineffable God can be traced back to a longstanding tradition extending from Judaism to Christianity, as Eckhart explores in his *Commentary on Exodus*. Like many other great thinkers in the Christian tradition, Eckhart is deeply captivated by that irresolvable linguistic puzzle: how can we talk about the ineffable God in human language? Given the Christian belief that God has revealed himself through the incarnated Word and that the Holy Bible contains the words of God, a Christian theologian is still confronted with the question: in what manner can God be properly conceived and predicated? This question must be considered first, before one commences any sort of theological speculation. Evidently Eckhart has paid a great deal of attention to this sophisticated question, and his thinking in this regard is not formulated in the form of philosophical treatise; instead Eckhart locates it in his scriptural commentary, to be precise, his solution to this knotty question is embedded in his comments on two specific verses drawn from *Exodus*, 'Almighty is his name' (*Ex.* 15:3) and 'You shall not take the name of your God in vain' (*Ex.* 20:7), as will be discussed below.

In his remarks on the scriptural text 'Almighty is his name' (*Ex.* 15:3), Eckhart addresses the issue of the name of God and the proper way to address the divine. As in many other places Eckhart particularly calls attention to the relevant works of Thomas; here he mentions Thomas's treatment of the names of God in *Summa Theologica* I,



q.13,<sup>409</sup> before rendering his own perspective on this topic. Clearly Eckhart develops his thesis from the groundwork accomplished by Thomas, and in this case he goes even further. He looks back to Greek philosophy<sup>410</sup> and Jewish tradition,<sup>411</sup> taking both as sources of inspiration for the Catholic writers, from the prominent church fathers such as Augustine and Boethius up to the scholastic thinkers like Thomas and himself in the late Middle Ages. Eckhart resorts to a wide range of scholarly studies and frequently quotes the preceding masters, in particular Maimonides, while hardly employing the ego-statement. The proceedings of his exploration are divided into four steps; thus we have four main points neatly formulated as follows: first, what some philosophers and Jewish authors think of this question and of the attributes which name God, such as when God is called substance, or good; second, what Catholic writers think of these predications or names; third, why do Boethius and the theologians generally teach that only two kinds of categories, substance and relation, can be used of divinity? And fourth, about the name more proper and especially particular to God, that is the ‘Tetragrammaton’, in his exposition of the verse ‘You shall not take the name of your God in vain’ (*Ex.* 20:7).<sup>412</sup>

The arrangement of the four points allows Eckhart to unfold his survey of the intellectual development surrounding this topic through the different traditions, and in the process of summarising the thoughts of the previous masters Eckhart weaves his own perspectives into the longstanding scholarly tradition. Here is seen more clearly than elsewhere Eckhart’s preference for the apophatic way of predication.<sup>413</sup> Eckhart relies heavily on Maimonides, to the extent that he goes through the detailed technical proof that Maimonides has provided in his *Guide for the Perplexed*. In nn.37-8 Eckhart lists the five ways in which an affirmative proposition of God comes about, and here we find a summary of what Maimonides has written in *Guide* 1:52, which leads to the conclusion that all the denominations attributed to God name only his work rather than his substance (n.43), and all the perfections in us are no longer so in God, hence it is clear that nothing can be positively attributed to God. Eckhart then resorts to the Greek

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<sup>409</sup> Thomas, *Summa Theol.* I, q.13. Q13 includes 12 articles; the disagreement between Eckhart and Thomas is manifest in a.2 and a.12. In the two articles Thomas holds to the stance that the names applied to God can be predicated of Him *substantially*, and *affirmative* propositions can be formed about God.

<sup>410</sup> In particular Aristotle’s ten categories in *Metaphysics*.

<sup>411</sup> Eckhart maintains his focus on Maimonides’s *The Guide for the Perplexed*.

<sup>412</sup> Eckhart, *In Ex.* n.34 (LW II 40,3-41,5), (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Teacher and Preacher*, 1986, 53).

<sup>413</sup> For a detailed study of Eckhart’s negative theology, see V. Lossky, *Théologie négative et connaissance de Dieu chez Maître Eckhart* (Paris, 1960), 251-337.

and Arabic philosophers and the Jewish sages, and gives eight proofs (nn.46-52) of the insufficiency involved in a positive proposition of God. Having dealt with the affirmatives, Eckhart turns to the negative names spoken about God and explains why these negative predications serve to bring us closer to God. Here again he quotes at length from Maimonides: ‘Whatever you add by way of negative names with respect to the Creator, you come nearer to grasping him and will be closer to him than the person who does not how to remove from God the perfections and attributes that have been proven to be far from him.’<sup>414</sup> Through the words of Maimonides Eckhart spells out what he intends to say on this issue. The citation of Maimonides is followed by an example through which the constructive role of the negative predications is illustrated.

It thus becomes explicit that Eckhart, in line with Maimonides, openly repudiates the way of attributing affirmative names and propositions to God, and in that sense the so-called cataphatic theology is marginalised if not ruled out from his thought. To Eckhart the apophatic way holds the key to knowledge of God, because it is only through removing from God the attributes that do not belong to him that we may advance in the divine knowledge.<sup>415</sup> This forms a clear contrast to the Thomistic stance as stated in *Summa Theol.* (I, q.13, a.12), where it is confirmed that *affirmative* propositions about God can be justified. Precisely on this point Eckhart distances himself from Thomas and plays down the role of affirmatives. His theory of predication is marked by the apophatic approach, which entails the so-called paradoxical<sup>416</sup> or dialectical way of thinking and speaking, namely to know the unknown and to speak the unspoken.

In his comments Eckhart also refers to Socrates’s claim that ‘I know that I do not know’<sup>417</sup> to justify the paradoxical way of speaking.<sup>418</sup> In a paradoxical expression,

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<sup>414</sup> Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, 1:58, the quotation found in Eckhart, *In Ex.* n.183 (LW II 156,13-157,2) (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Teacher and Preacher*, 1986, 101).

<sup>415</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>416</sup> To those who take Eckhart as a spiritual master, the word ‘paradox’ seems to possess the power to convey the dynamic and lively character of his spiritual legacy. For instance, Cyprian Smith summarises Eckhart’s spiritual approach as ‘the way of paradox’, ‘because he [Eckhart] sees the Reality of God as something that can be grasped only within the tension and clash of opposites. This tension has to be experienced in our daily life; this is the practice of *detachment*. But it also has to be experienced in our thinking and talking about God; and this involves *paradox*.’ See Cyprian Smith, *The Way of Paradox: spiritual life as thought by Meister Eckhart* (London, 1987), 24.

<sup>417</sup> Eckhart, *In Ex.* n.184 (LW II 158,14) (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Teacher and Preacher*, 1986, 101).

<sup>418</sup> McGinn calls attention to this issue repeatedly in a number of his works on Eckhart. Most noteworthy in his discussion on Eckhart’s dialectical way of predication is his excellent summary of Eckhart’s theology in *Essential Eckhart*, and his paper ‘Meister Eckhart on God as Absolute Unity’, in Dominic J. O’Meara (ed.), *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought, Studies in Neoplatonism* 3 (Albany, 1982), 128-39.

the two contradictory propositions<sup>419</sup> such as ‘I know’ and ‘I do not know’, are fused into one, and are simultaneously true. This kind of paradoxical structure is distinctive of Eckhartian style. A good example is seen in his *Commentary on Exodus*, where we read: ‘You should know that nothing is as dissimilar as the Creator and any creature. In the second place, nothing is as similar as the Creator and any creature. And in the third place, nothing is as equally dissimilar and similar in the same degree.’<sup>420</sup> The dialectical or paradoxical way is indicative of Eckhart’s attempt to find a better way of speaking of God, which seems to suggest a kind of self-contradiction, an open defiance of the fundamental principle of logical demonstration.

Eckhart’s adoption of the paradoxical structure is rooted in his thinking on the relation in the Godhead, alluding to the third point as mentioned above, where Eckhart poses the question: ‘Why do Boethius and the theologians generally teach that only two kinds of categories, substance and relation, can be used of divinity?’<sup>421</sup> Eckhart highlights the point that although relation is accident, it does not predicate in the manner of the eight categories such as quality, quantity, and so on, because relation is not absorbed into substance or subject, nor does it say that anything exists or inheres. On the contrary, the category of relation posits the opposite of something; in other words, it states that ‘the thing that exists comes from another and is directed to another’.<sup>422</sup> It follows that relation in the Godhead does not predicate the essence or substance of the Father, but of the mutually opposed Trinitarian persons. To apply the category of relation to a concrete subject, e.g. Martin, it is plain that Martin would know and be white through substance, nonetheless he would not be related or referred to anything through substance, but rather through relation according to the idea and property of the genus relation.<sup>423</sup>

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In this paper McGinn particularly turns to Gadamer’s formulation to clarify the meaning of dialectical thinking, which can be further traced back to Hegel and the ancient philosophers. He briefly points out the three elements essential to dialectical thinking: 1) thinking of determinations by themselves; 2) simultaneously thinking of contradictory determinations; and 3) the positive content of the higher unity of contradictory determinations. All of these were present in ancient philosophy by the time of Plato. 136-7.

<sup>419</sup> For the definition of contraries, see Aristotle, *On Interpretation*, VI and VII.

<sup>420</sup> Eckhart, *In Ex.* n.112 (LW II 110,3-6) (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Teacher and Preacher*, 1986, 81).

<sup>421</sup> Eckhart addresses this question in *In Ex.* n.34 (LW II 40,14-42,2) and n.62 (LW II 67,3-5), (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Teacher and Preacher*, 1986, 53 and 64).

<sup>422</sup> Eckhart, *In Ex.* n.64 (LW II 68,8-10) (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Teacher and Preacher*, 1986, 64).

<sup>423</sup> Eckhart, *In Ex.* n.72 (LW II 75,4-14) (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Teacher and Preacher*, 1986, 67).

Taking the category of relation into account, Eckhart often addresses the two opposing ends in one relation, for example God and the world. In Eckhart the divine is most likely to be predicated in terms of relation. Unlike substance, the category of relation always implies the formal opposition between the two ends. Thus we have the relational predication of God and the world in various versions, for instance, in *Parisian Question 1* God is predicated as the divine intellect versus the world as being or existence; whereas in the *Commentary on Exodus*, God is taken as existence or being versus the world as the opposite, which is non-being.<sup>424</sup>

## 2.2.2 Eckhart's Notion of the Human Intellect Unfolded in his Commentaries

As revealed in the *Parisian Questions* Eckhart does not particularly differentiate the human intellect from the angelic intellect and the divine intellect; what he intends to demonstrate is rather the universal nature of intellect *per se*, which can be applied to all three. The outline he sketches in the scholastic *quaestiones* gains fuller exposition in his scriptural commentaries,<sup>425</sup> in which one sees a nuanced distinction between the human and the angelic intellect, and the difference between the created intellect (which includes the angelic and the human intellect) and the divine intellect. Although in Eckhart the divine and the human intellect are treated as being fundamentally one intellect, that does not mean the divine can be simply identified with the human or vice versa. His elucidation of this line of thought is unfolded through some focused and exhaustive commentaries on a number of selected scriptural texts, in particular, his commentaries on *John* and *Exodus*. For the sake of clarity in expression, we will first examine in what sense Eckhart takes into consideration a distinction between the human, the angelic and the divine intellect, and then look separately at Eckhart's expositions of the divine intellect and of the human intellect. On that basis we will discuss precisely how Eckhart addresses the identification of the two.

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<sup>424</sup> Bernard McGinn addresses the theme raised by Eckhart during the Cologne proceedings, the distinction between the 'absolute existence' of God and the 'formally inherent existence' of creature. Following this pattern, it holds true that if *esse* is properly affirmed of God, it must be denied to creature; likewise if *esse* is properly affirmed of creature, then it must be denied of God. See Bernard McGinn, 'Theological Summary', *Essential Eckhart* (1981), 33.

<sup>425</sup> Eckhart is one of the few who composed both scholastic *quaestiones* and biblical commentaries. William J. Courtenay includes Eckhart in his list of biblical commentators of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, see note 286,

### **2.2.2.1 Distinction between the Three: the Divine, the Angelic and the Human Intellect**

The argumentation Eckhart develops in his *Parisian Questions* mainly focuses on his own contribution to a knotty question that had puzzled the scholastic theologians for a long time. Eckhart engages in a lengthy discussion of the distinction between the three types of intellect, which had been fully expounded by Thomas.<sup>426</sup> The focus of his reasoning in the *Parisian Questions* is on the new ways of proof, and in that sense his approach is distinct from that of Thomas. Nevertheless, in his commentary writing, Eckhart makes more room for the thoughts of the antecedent church fathers, masters and saints, among whom the illustrious brother Thomas is prominent. Other authors, such as Augustine, Boethius, Rabbi Moses and Avicenna, are also frequently mentioned and quoted. Unlike disputed questions, commentary as a literary form is intended to integrate the intellectual achievement of the previous masters, and in that sense commentary writing entails a systematic approach to the biblical scholarship developed over centuries. That probably explains why Eckhart incorporates into his commentary a distinction made by Thomas between the divine intellect, the angelic intellect and the human intellect which, as mentioned earlier, does not appear at all in Eckhart's disputed questions.

The distinction between the three types of intellect as seen in Eckhart's commentaries is chiefly grounded on two relevant doctrines: 1) Eckhart's teaching with regard to the essential order of the creatures, which consists of the three modes of existence: to be, to live and to know. This line of thought underpins Eckhart's understanding of the cosmological structure as a whole. 2) Corresponding to the distinction between being, living and knowing, Eckhart addresses the diversity in the way things are enlightened by God, which points to his notion of an ordered and directed omnipotent power in God.

The doctrine concerning the essential order is briefly touched on in *Parisian Question 1*, where we read: 'Some say that existence, life and intelligence can be viewed in two ways: 1) in themselves, and then existence is first, life second, and intelligence third; 2) in relation to that which participates in them, then intelligence is first, life second, and existence third. But I believe the exact opposite to be true.'<sup>427</sup> What Eckhart says here alludes to the view expressed by Dionysius in his *De Divinis Nominibus* (5.3), which is confirmed by Thomas in *Summa Theologica* (I, q.4, a.2), that

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<sup>426</sup> See Thomas, *Summa Theol.*, I, q.54, 79, 84 and 85.

<sup>427</sup> Eckhart, *Quaest. Par. I* n.6 (LW V 42,8-43,3) (trans. Armand A. Maurer in *Parisian Questions and Prologues*, 1974, 46-7).

God's existence includes in itself life and wisdom. Unlike Thomas and Dionysius, Eckhart maintains that among the perfections attributed to God, the perfection of knowing is prior to the perfection of being. A fuller exposition of this theme is seen in Eckhart's commentaries, most explicitly in *Commentary on John* with reference to the verse 'What was made in him was life' (*Jn.* 1.3-4). Eckhart's extensive comments on this verse include five points. Before addressing the order concerning the three levels – to be, to live and to understand – Eckhart first points out that in God the three perfections are in each other, for example, 'to be and to live in understanding is simply understanding and to understand, to be and to understand in life, simply is to live and life'.<sup>428</sup> He then underlines that 'God alone, insofar as he is Final End and First Mover, lives and is life'.<sup>429</sup> Because to be alive means to be moved by itself or by a principle within itself, in that sense nothing but God can properly be called life. Having clarified the meaning of life and the inter-inclusive nature of the three perfections in God, Eckhart turns to the realm below the divine and starts to discuss the three distinct levels – to be, to live and to understand. These levels, Eckhart believes, complete the totality of being, and their order can be reversed when considered differently; for example, in terms of the abstract, to be is the most perfect, followed by to live and to understand; however, taken in terms of the concrete, the mode of being holds the lowest place, the mode of living is higher than that of being, and the mode of knowing is higher than that of living, thus to know ranks the highest.

The reason for making this distinction lies in the fact that the concrete refers to the participated beings. What Eckhart means by participated being is the being that is empty and imperfect on its own, and thus shares in a more perfect level of participation. Following this logic, the lower level of being is included in the next higher level, so that a mere being is included in a living being, and a living being is included in an intelligent being. Eckhart makes the point that the level or degree of perfection that a being possesses is dependent on what kind of existence it includes, rather than on its own existence. According to the essential order of existence, Eckhart concludes that what is inferior is not only included in the next higher level, but more importantly it exists in a more noble fashion and a more perfect way in its superior.<sup>430</sup> He even claims

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<sup>428</sup> Eckhart, *In Ioh.* n.61 (LW III 51,3-4) (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 144, altered).

<sup>429</sup> *Ibid.* n.62 (LW III 51,11-2) (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 144).

<sup>430</sup> *Ibid.* n.63 (LW III 52,4-5), (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 144).

that man's intellect is the nearest superior intellective power to a living thing because it is the lowest intellective power, which explicitly references Thomas's lengthy explanation unfolded in *Summa Theologica*.<sup>431</sup>

The distinction between the human intellect and the angelic intellect is seen in Eckhart's comments on the next verse, 'The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it' (*Jn.* 1.5). Here Eckhart differentiates the human intellect from the angelic intellect, thus the aforementioned three levels become four grades, and beings in the universe can be divided into four degrees or types: mere beings, living beings, the human intellect, and the angelic intellect, as well as any other that might be separated, free from matter and image. Furthermore, Eckhart associates each grade with a relevant verse in the sacred scriptures. For instance, the first grade, mere beings, refers to 'What was made'; the second grade, living beings, to 'in him was life'; the third grade, the human intellect, to 'life was the light of men'; and the fourth grade, the angelic intellect, to 'the light shines in the darkness'.<sup>432</sup> By 'the darkness' Eckhart means the highest in the realm of intellect which is invisible to us; he then uses the metaphor of fire to elucidate this point. Just as the highest and finest element, fire, is invisible in its proper matter and sphere, the highest and finest in the realm of intellect appears to be invisible and unknown to us, thus is called 'darkness'. Based on this interpretation, the passage 'And the darkness did not comprehend it' is regarded as well put, on which Eckhart comments: 'If the highest intellects denoted by "darkness" cannot comprehend the light that is God, then it is clear that he is absolutely "incomprehensible to thought"'.<sup>433</sup> The essential order is also addressed in *The Book of the Parables of Genesis*, as will be discussed later.

In relation to the four grades of the created beings, Eckhart spells out the five ways in which things are enlightened by the divine light. The details of this line of thought are unfolded in his comments on the verse 'He enlightens every man who comes into this world' (*Jn.* 1.9), which causes difficulty in comprehension: how is it that many still walk in darkness if God really enlightens every man in the world? Before Eckhart this question had been attentively treated by the church fathers, especially Origen,

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<sup>431</sup> Thomas, *Summa Theol.*, I, q.79, a.2. In q.79, a.1, Thomas affirms his position that intellect is a power of the soul, not the very essence of the soul. In God alone is His intellect His essence, while in other intellectual creatures, the intellect is power. In q.79, a.2, Thomas gives lengthy exposition on the difference between the divine intellect, the angelic intellect and the human intellect.

<sup>432</sup> Eckhart, *In Ioh.* nn. 83-4 (LW III 71,4-72,2) (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 153).

<sup>433</sup> *Ibid.* n. 84 (LW III 72,10-2) (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 153).

Chrysostom and Augustine, whose views are clearly summarised by Thomas and are integrated in his *Gloss on John*. Based on the works of the church fathers, Thomas extends the means of enlightenment from the traditional understanding, which takes enlightenment as exclusively the work of grace, to a broader view which allows the light of natural knowledge to be included.<sup>434</sup> Unlike these three prominent church fathers who focus their attention on grace, Thomas expounds two ways in which God enlightens the world, namely as the light of natural knowledge and as the light of grace.<sup>435</sup>

Despite Thomas's elucidation, Eckhart observes that many continue to be puzzled by this difficult passage. Eckhart attributes the difficulty to a so-called 'twofold false mental image': 1) They imagine that things are not present equally and immediately to God at the same time; 2) They think that grace is an illumination alone, whereas existence itself is an illumination and a source of all enlightening perfections.<sup>436</sup> Both issues had been addressed by Thomas: the first particularly in *Summa Theologica* (I, q.22, a.3) and *Summa contra Gentiles* (III, q.76), and the second in his comments on this verse (*Gloss on John* 1:9). Parallels between Thomas and Eckhart's commentary on the same text suggest that Thomas's *Gloss on John* collected in his *Catena aurea* has had a great impact on Eckhart's *Commentary on John*: the same question runs through both Thomas's and Eckhart's commentaries, despite a difference in wording or even in solution.

Following Thomas's clarification of a distinction between the light of natural knowledge and the light of grace, Eckhart spells out the diversity in the way things are enlightened by the divine light:

It is indeed true that he enlightens and influences different people and different things in different ways, some by light according to the property (this is the way he enlightens every being in the universe); others in more restricted numbers by light as life (this is the case with living beings). He enlightens other more perfect beings fewer in number insofar as he is 'the light of men', according to the Psalm text. 'The light of your countenance, Lord, is shined upon us' (Ps. 4:7), that is, reason, which points to and shows what is good. In the fourth way, he

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<sup>434</sup> Thomas, *Catena Aurea in Ioannem* 1:9.

<sup>435</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>436</sup> Eckhart, *In Ioh.* n.94 (LW III 81,5-12) (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 158).



enlightens beings that are more perfect than men by illuminating them himself without shadow of phantasms. In the fifth way, he enlightens others by grace, the supernatural light.<sup>437</sup>

Among the five ways, the fifth refers to the supernatural light of grace,<sup>438</sup> which is the new effect specifically brought about by the incarnation of the Word, hence the light of grace is no other than the light of salvation. In contrast to the sanctifying effect of the incarnate Word expressed in the fifth way, the other four ways clearly correspond to the aforementioned four grades of creature. Thus it becomes clear that God enlightens all, whether mere beings, living beings, human beings or angelic beings, to the extent that the nature of that being allows. The whole universe is preserved by the presence of God; should the divine light withdraw, nothing will be able to exist. Despite the fact that no creature is excluded from the illumination of the divine light, it is still necessary for the Word to be incarnated into this world, because those in the world do not know God unless through the Son – the incarnate Word. Thus we have the fifth way, the highest way of illumination, which pertains to the supernatural grace or the sanctifying power of God.

Here arises the question: Who is the receiver of the supernatural grace or the sanctifying power? Put another way, towards whom is the sanctifying grace directed? In the aforequoted passage Eckhart uses the term ‘*others*’ to distinguish the receiver of the sanctifying grace from the created beings that exist according to the essential order and are subject to the light of natural knowledge, which also participates in the divine light. To understand what Eckhart means by ‘*others*’, we must refer to another text, where we find a fuller exposition of grace. In his *Commentary on Wisdom* Eckhart expounds the two types of grace: 1) the grace that is freely given to all, which pertains to God’s creation and preservation of the world, whereby the presence of God is seen in every creature; and 2) the sanctifying grace, which entails a directed power that only works on the essence of the soul in a purely spiritual manner.<sup>439</sup> It follows that the

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<sup>437</sup> Eckhart, *In Ioh.* n.89 (LW III 77,1-8) (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 155-6).

<sup>438</sup> Here Eckhart seems to restrict the work of ‘grace’ to the sanctifying power, rather than referring to the two types of grace expounded in his *Commentary on the Book of the Wisdom*, see below.

<sup>439</sup> Eckhart, *In Sap.* nn.272-3 (LW II 602,2-603,9): ‘De gratia ad praesens duo notanda sunt. Primum est quod omne, quod operator deus in creatura, gratia est et gratis datur. Ratio est, quia primum unquam cadit sub merito. In omni autem re primum est id quod a deo, utpote primo, datur... Secundo notandum quod gratia gratum faciens, quae et supernaturalis dicitur, est in solo intellectivo, sed nec in illo, ut res est et natura, sed est in ipso ut intellectus et ut naturam sapit divinam, et ut sic est superior natura, et per consequens supernaturale.’

sanctifying grace, as the essence of the divine, ‘falls on the ground of the intellect’ due to the nature of the intellect.<sup>440</sup> Thus it is clear that the term ‘*others*’ alludes to the intellect that is proper to the sanctifying power of the incarnate Word.

All of the five ways articulated here follow the same principle Eckhart repeatedly addresses in many of his works; that is, the superior only influences its inferior, thus the divine light only enlightens what is subject to him. In other words, the enlightening power entails a direction, from the superior to the inferior, and only works on what is within its remit. This gives resonance to Eckhart’s discussion over the omnipotent power of the divine in the first newly re-discovered *Parisian Question*, to which his answer is that the omnipotence in God needs to be considered as absolute power; in other words, God has power over all things that exist, except nothing, which is non-existence.<sup>441</sup>

Thus, in Eckhart, the essential order of the created things echoes the ordered almighty power of God directed from the superior to the inferior. In that sense God truly enlightens or influences different things in different ways.

Having expounded the different ways in which things are enlightened, Eckhart comes to the point that despite the aforesaid diversity, God nevertheless regards all things equally, uniformly and immediately, and is present to all before anything else.<sup>442</sup> To illustrate this point Eckhart gives an example concerning the relation of the soul to the body. He says the way God enlightens all is similar to the way the soul, as the substantial form of the body, is immediately and totally present to and influences differently each part of the body, in the sense of giving existence and life to them. This is different from other perfections of the soul, such as sight and hearing, which cannot communicate to every part of the body.<sup>443</sup> A more scholastic expression is found in Eckhart’s comments on the verse ‘Almighty is his name’ (*Exodus* 15:3). In his *Commentary on Exodus* Eckhart formulates a more technical proof: ‘Every agent has natural power over those things (and through itself only over those things) which are

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<sup>440</sup> Eckhart, *In Sap.* n.273 (LW II 603,10-604,1): ‘Sic ergo gratia supernaturalis in solo cadit intellectu, ut intellectus est super naturam.’

<sup>441</sup> Eckhart, the first newly re-discovered *Parisian Question*, *Quaestio Par. Nov. I*: ‘Utrum omnipotentia quae est in Deo debeat attendi secundum potentiam absolutam vel secundum potentiam ordinatam’, in *Magistri Eckhardi: Quaestiones Parisienses Supplementum* (2011), 461-2.

<sup>442</sup> Although the division of the four different grades of the creature is not mentioned in the first three *Parisian Questions*, which cover the divine, the angelic and the human intellect.

<sup>443</sup> Eckhart, *In Ioh.* nn.91-93 (LW III 78,9-81,4) (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 156-7).

contained under the form which is the principle of agent's action. But existence is the principle of every divine action. Therefore, God has power over everything that is or can be.<sup>444</sup> God cannot influence those that fall out of the realm of existence, just as fire only acts upon things that can be heated, and through itself on nothing that is not subject to heat and fire's form. Similarly, in his *Commentary on Wisdom* Eckhart affirms the point that the sanctifying grace of the divine falls on the ground of the intellect as shown above, insofar as the intellect partakes in the divine nature, is wise and is the image of God or conforming to the image of God.<sup>445</sup>

Viewing the human intellect in the light of the essential order of the creature, we come to the conclusion that human beings are embedded in a hierarchical order of the universe in which the human intellect is to be differentiated from the angelic intellect. Similarly, with reference to the five ways in which things can be enlightened by the divine, it becomes clear that the human intellect receives the divine illumination in a way that differs from the manner in which an angelic being is enlightened by the divine. Overall we can see that in his commentaries Eckhart pays a great deal of attention to the hierarchical distinction written in the order of nature, which is very much in line with Thomas. Like Thomas, Eckhart takes both the natural and supernatural aspects into account when considering the divine illumination, and in that sense the scholastic commentaries such as Thomas's *Gloss on John* and Eckhart's *Commentary on John* enrich the longstanding tradition of biblical scholarship by offering a more inclusive reading of the evangelist's message, one in which 'God enlightens all' with respect to the light of natural knowledge does not contradict the fact that some are still in darkness with respect to the light of grace.

With the two sets of the divine illumination in mind, we come to see that Eckhart's thinking with regard to the human intellect contains a message of twofold meaning. When it is the order of nature that is being considered, a clear distinction is seen between the human intellect and the angelic intellect; both fall into the category of the created intellect, which forms a contrast to the divine intellect. Nevertheless, should the supernatural light of the divine grace be taken into consideration, the division preserved in the natural order of the universe between the human intellect, the angelic

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<sup>444</sup> Eckhart, *In Ex.* n.28 (LW II 32,9-12) (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Teacher and Preacher*, 1986, 50).

<sup>445</sup> Eckhart, *In Sap.* n.274 (LW II 604,10-1): 'Gratia igitur gratum faciens et supernaturalis est in intellectivo, inquantum intellectus particeps est et sapit naturam divinam et ut est imago sive ad imaginem dei.'

intellect and the divine intellect can be overcome, due to the incarnation of the Word in this world.

#### **2.2.2.2 The Divine Intellect**

##### *a) Intellect as the key to the emanation of the Son and the creation of the world*

In the very first *Parisian Question* Eckhart calls attention to the divine intellect and claims that in God knowing is prior to being. He turns to John's gospel for scriptural support and justifies his thesis by the opening sentence 'In the beginning'<sup>446</sup> was the Word'. Indeed, John's gospel becomes the main scriptural source for Eckhart to develop his thinking of the divine intellect. Looking back down the long tradition of biblical exegesis, we can see that long before Eckhart undertook the task of commentary writing, the evangelist's message had been expounded by many Christian thinkers, including Thomas, Augustine, John Chrysostom and Origen. Therefore, Eckhart must have had various versions of commentary on this transmitted text at his disposal whilst composing his own *Commentary on John*.

This is illustrated particularly in his commentaries on *John* 1:1 and *Genesis* 1:1. Eckhart's expositions of these two passages mutually illuminate each other, and the core of his exegesis lies in the divine intellect and its internal connection with the emanation of the Trinitarian persons and the creation of the world. As well as his exegesis of the two verses 'In the beginning was the Word' (*Jn.* 1:1) and 'In the beginning, God created heaven and earth' (*Gn.* 1:1), Eckhart's thinking on creation is also unfolded in his *Commentary on Wisdom*, in particular his comments on the verse 'He created all things that they might be' (*Ws.* 1:14).

Based on the selected biblical texts, Eckhart weaves his theory of creation into his commentary. Here and there he makes the point that the New and the Old Testaments convey the same message. Not only does he intend to make clear that the emanation of the persons in the Godhead is hinted at by the authors of the Old Testament, he also attempts to prove that the emanation of the persons in the Godhead is the prior ground of creation,<sup>447</sup> although he admits that in the Old Testament there is no open reference

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<sup>446</sup> As McGinn has pointed out, the Latin *principius* can mean both 'beginning' and 'principle'. Eckhart emphasises now one and now the other of these aspects (as the translation tries to indicate), but both senses are always present, in *Essential Eckhart* (1981), note 6, 318.

<sup>447</sup> Eckhart, *In Ex.* n.16 (LW II 22,7-8) (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Teacher and Preacher*, 1986, 46).

to the emanation of the Trinitarian persons, whereas John's gospel speaks directly of the emanation of the Son in the Godhead.<sup>448</sup>

Eckhart seems to focus his attention on the inner connection between the emanation of the Son from the Father in the Godhead and the creation of the world which falls out of the divine realm. In both cases Eckhart takes intellect as the principle: in accordance with the same principle the Son proceeds from the Father and the world proceeds from virtual existence to formal reality. As '*principium*' has the meaning of 'beginning' and 'principle', Eckhart's expositions entail both aspects, one to do with the concept of time, the other the concept of 'Idea'. In his commentary on *Genesis*, Eckhart interprets 'In the beginning' as in 'the first simple now of eternity',<sup>449</sup> so that creation is to be fixed in the everlasting now. Similarly, in his commentary on the prologue to *John* Eckhart first takes away time, so that the Son has always been co-existing with the Father in the Godhead. It follows that the Son, the Word, or the Idea is always being conceived in the divine intellect, and it is precisely according to the Idea that the world was created. So the emanation of the Trinitarian persons in the Godhead and the creation of the world are a simultaneous one, rather than two different processes. In Eckhart's own words: 'In the one and the same time in which he was God and in which he begot his coeternal Son as God equal to himself in all things, he also created the world.'<sup>450</sup>

Hence the Word as the archetypal Idea is only logically prior to the world. Eckhart repeatedly addresses the point that before the world's foundation there was the Word; the world in pre-creation is not regarded as mere nothing, but rather as the effect in its primordial, essential and original cause, or a seed in its principle. That points to another beginning of things which is rooted in the divine intellect and is thus higher than nature, as the intellect orders each natural thing to its established end. Therefore the 'principle' (*principio*) in which God created heaven and earth is the nature of intellect, which is in opposition to the necessitarianism proclaimed by the Arabic philosophers such as Avicenna.<sup>451</sup>

In both his *Commentary on Genesis* and *Commentary on John*, the divine intellect is tied up with the two aspects: the emanation of the persons in the Godhead and the

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<sup>448</sup> Eckhart, *In Ioh.* n.35 (LW III 29,6-10) (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 134).

<sup>449</sup> Eckhart, *In Gen.* n.7 (LW I 190,1-2,) (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 84).

<sup>450</sup> *Ibid.* n.7 (LW I 190,11-2) (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 85).

<sup>451</sup> Avicenna's view as to creation out of necessity is seen in his *Metaphysics* 9:4.

creation of the world. With regard to the former Eckhart attributes intellect to the Son, and maintains that the Son in the Godhead ‘proceeds from the Father according to intellect, just as the Holy Spirit proceeds according to love’.<sup>452</sup> Intellect is deemed the principle or fashion in which the Son is begotten by the Father in the Godhead. The emanation of the divine persons in the Trinity, that is the emanation of the Son from the Father and that of the Holy Spirit from both the Son and the Father, should be considered in spiritual terms. The spiritual emanation of the Trinitarian persons in the divine realm is prior to the creation of the world, in which process the material is involved.

The development from the pure spiritual realm to the material world involves the conjunction of the spiritual and the material, which gives rise to the composition of matter and form. There is a subtle difference between the substantial form of something and the idea of it in the creator’s mind. The idea of a thing never leaves the creator even after that thing is created according to the idea, nor will the idea disappear when that thing is destroyed. Thus the idea of a thing is capable of separate existence; it pertains to the extrinsic causes, as for example the creating agent and the goal.<sup>453</sup> But the substantial form of a thing exists only in that thing and no longer exists once that thing is destroyed, and the substantial form is the intrinsic cause of the thing. Eckhart makes this more explicit in his *Commentary on Exodus*, where he states that the forms of things which give things names and species are formally in things and in no way in God, while the ideas of things are in God, but are given neither names nor species.<sup>454</sup>

When commenting on the verse ‘He created all things that they might be’ (Ws.1:14), Eckhart employs a different vocabulary, and the focus seems to shift from intellect to existence, whereby God is the source of existence, and creation is the conferring of ‘existence after nonexistence’.<sup>455</sup> Eckhart addresses in particular the point that all things including those made by art or nature derive their existence from God. It follows that the existence or *esse* of things looks to an outside cause: for instance, that a man or an animal exists comes from another, but that a man is an animal or substance, comes from nothing but himself. In a proposition such as ‘man is an animal’, the word ‘is’

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<sup>452</sup> Eckhart, *In Ioh.* n.33 (LW III 27,4-5): ‘Quarta, quod procedit a patre sub proprietate intellectus sicut spiritus sanctus secundum proprietatem amoris.’ (Trans. in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 133.)

<sup>453</sup> Eckhart mentions the extrinsic and intrinsic causes in many places; a brief explanation is found in his *In Ex.* n.52 (LW II 55,10-56,2) (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Teacher and Preacher*, 1986, 59-60).

<sup>454</sup> Eckhart, *In Ex.* n.121 (LW II 114,6-9) (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Teacher and Preacher*, 1986, 83).

<sup>455</sup> Eckhart, *In Sap.* n.19 (LW II 340,10-1) (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Teacher and Preacher*, 1986, 147).

does not involve the existence of things, it serves only to connect terms. The statement ‘man is an animal’ would not be less true even if no man existed.<sup>456</sup>

In his commentary on this passage, Eckhart also treats existence as the first and final cause. In other words, existence is the goal of creation. If someone asks why God created all things, the answer would be ‘that they might be’.<sup>457</sup> Here Eckhart distinguishes the virtual existence from the formal existence. A house virtually existing in the mind of the architect is not a real house. A house receives its formal existence insofar as it is produced through its efficient cause. Similarly, all things are in God as effect is in its cause or the idea is in the mind of the maker; things do not have their formal existence until they are formally created. If we take the formal existence of something as real existence, then what exists virtually in the intellect should be deemed nonexistence; hence ‘creation is conferring of existence after nonexistence’.<sup>458</sup> The divine intellect is the cause of existence and the source of creation.

To summarise, in opposition to those who believe things are created from the necessity of nature, Eckhart argues that ‘God’s nature is intellect’<sup>459</sup> and ‘intellect is the principle of the whole nature’.<sup>460</sup> It is ‘the intellect that orders each natural thing to its established end’,<sup>461</sup> which ushers in ‘another beginning of things that is higher than nature’.<sup>462</sup> Seen in the light of the intellect, Eckhart pictures the whole universe as a fine piece of work, a rational creation of the divine power. Such is the significance of intellect that it runs through the emanation of the Son from the Father as well as the creation of the world through the Son.

#### *b) Intellect and Idea*

In his *Commentary on John*, Eckhart quotes Augustine and expounds the Greek term *logos* from two aspects: *logos* as ‘idea’ and as ‘word’. He then gives an extensive exposition of the Latin ‘idea’ and ‘word’, and attributes logic – the science that teaches

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<sup>456</sup> Eckhart, *In Sap.* n.20 (LW II 341,11-342,2) (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Teacher and Preacher*, 1986, 148).

<sup>457</sup> *Ibid.* n.26 (LW II 346,1-2) (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Teacher and Preacher*, 1986, 149).

<sup>458</sup> *Ibid.* n.19 (LW II 340,10-1) (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Teacher and Preacher*, 1986, 147).

<sup>459</sup> Eckhart, *In Gen.* n.11 (LW I 1, 194,11-195,1): ‘Sed natura dei est intellectus, et sibi esse est intelligere, igitur producit res in esse per intellectum.’ (Trans. Bernard McGinn in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 86.)

<sup>460</sup> *Ibid.* n.6 (LW I 1, 189,9): ‘Intellectus enim principium est totius naturae.’ (Trans. Bernard McGinn in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 84.)

<sup>461</sup> Eckhart, *In Ioh.* n.45 (LW III 37,14-38,1): ‘et quod hoc est intellectus ordinans res singulas naturales in certos fines’ (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 137).

<sup>462</sup> *Ibid.*

how to construct arguments – to ‘idea’, and connects ‘word’ with linguistic expression.<sup>463</sup> This alludes to Thomas’s exposition of Plato’s idea in *Summa Theol.* I, q.15, a.3, in which Thomas holds that the meaning of Plato’s idea is twofold: 1) as the principle of making things which pertains to practical knowledge; in this case idea means ‘exemplar’; and 2) as the principle of knowledge; in this case, idea is properly called ‘type’ and also belongs to speculative knowledge. When Eckhart addresses the link between logic and idea, he clearly takes ‘idea’ as the principle of knowledge. But with regard to the issue of creation as shown above, ‘idea’ is more to do with the principle of making things. Thus the notion of ‘idea’ pertains not only to creating, but more importantly to understanding. In Eckhart these two lines are often intertwined.

From Eckhart’s exposition as unfolded in his commentaries, we have the impression that he frequently brings creation, art and nature together, and uses one to exemplify the other, for he believes the three proceed in like manner. In order to understand how God created the world, we can take the production of a house as an example. Like an architect who builds a house according to the idea of the house in his mind, God created the world *through* the Son who is the ideal image of God and the Idea of the whole world. God created the world according to his own image, the Son, without which neither the creation of the world nor the intelligibility of it would be possible. God could not create the world without having preconceived the Idea or Form of it, and we would not be able to understand the world without knowing the Idea or Form of it, namely the Son. Hence the Idea is essential to God’s creating of the world and to our understanding of it.

Undoubtedly creating differs from understanding: the former is to impose the idea conceived in the creator or producer’s mind upon a substance so that a thing comes into being as a result; whereas the latter is to grasp the idea of a thing that is inherent in a substance, and is usually carried out by another intelligent being rather than the producer himself. Nevertheless, as far as the idea is concerned, the producer, the product and the one who understands the product are one. This is because the idea is preconceived in the producer’s mind, exists formally in the product, and is also virtually assimilated in the knower’s mind. Both the conceiving and the receiving of the idea are conducted by the same faculty, namely the intellect.

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<sup>463</sup> Eckhart, *In Ioh.* n. 28 (LW III 22,9-12) (trans. Bernard McGinn, in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 131). Eckhart quotes this passage from Augustine’s *Book of Eighty-Three Questions*, 63.



The power of understanding is proper to the intellect, and the intellect receives its object, namely the intelligible, not in itself, insofar as it is complete and perfect, but in its principle.<sup>464</sup> The corporeal beings by nature do not distinguish the thing from the idea, which can only be grasped by a rational or intellectual being.<sup>465</sup> In other words, the idea of a thing which is prior to the thing is to be taken in by the intellect. In the act of understanding, the intellect and the idea are fused into one. On that account Eckhart identifies the idea with the intellect: ‘the idea is in the intellect, it is formed by understanding and is nothing else than understanding’, and ‘it is equal in time with the intellect’.<sup>466</sup> So long as the operation of the intellect is proceeding in the domain of ideas, it is necessary that the intellect and the idea become one, and the separation between the knower and what is known will then be overcome. In this case, the intellect grasps the idea in the way that it grasps something in its principle, root and cause.

Eckhart acknowledges that there is another way in which the idea is grasped by the intellect.<sup>467</sup> This occurs when the intellect abstracts the idea from things, and the idea that is obtained from external things is naturally posterior to the things.<sup>468</sup> In that case, the exercise of intellect pertains to sense perception as well as the activity of the mind, which is to order the perceptual data and to generalise the universal element subsisting in the particular things. Although he does not rule out the empirical approach to knowledge, Eckhart concerns himself with the kind of knowledge concerning the idea that is prior to things, capable of separate existence and not intermingled with things. Clearly, idea in that sense is to be received in the intrinsic principles rather than being abstracted from things. Consequently intellectual conduct becomes independent of things and deals exclusively with the ideas rather than things.

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<sup>464</sup> Eckhart, *In Ioh.* n.9 (LW III 10,1-3): ‘Decimo notandum quod proprium intellectus est obiectum suum, intelligibile scilicet, accipere non in se, ut totum quoddam, perfectum et bonum est, sed accipere in suis principiis.’ (trans. Bernard McGinn, in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 125.)

<sup>465</sup> *Ibid.* n.31 (LW III 24): ‘Natura enim corporalis ut sic non distinguit inter rem et rationem, quia non novit rationem, quam solum accipit et novit rationale sive intellectivum.’ (Trans. Bernard McGinn, in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 132.)

<sup>466</sup> *Ibid.* n.38 (LW III 33,10-2): ‘Iterum et ratio in intellectu est, intelligendo formatur, nihil praeter intelligere est. Iterum etiam coeva est intellectui, cum sit ipsum intelligere et ipse intellectus.’ (Trans. Bernard McGinn, in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 135.)

<sup>467</sup> Reiner Schürmann tackles this issue under the title ‘exterior and interior knowledge’. See Reiner Schürmann, *Meister Eckhart: Mystic and Philosopher* (Bloomington and London, 1978), 144-8.

<sup>468</sup> *Ibid.* n.29 (LW III 22,13-23,2): ‘Secundo notandum quod ratio dupliciter accipitur: est enim ratio a rebus accepta sive abstracta per intellectum, et haec est rebus posterior a quibus abstrahitur; est et ratio rebus prior, causa rerum et ratio, quam diffinitio indicat et intellectus accipit in ipsis principiis intrinsicis.’ (Trans. Bernard McGinn in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 131.)

The ideas of things are derived from the Idea, which is the Son or the Word of God, and God himself is the First Intellect. On the basis of the above reasoning, Eckhart affirms that ‘the Idea in the proper sense is certainly in the First Intellect’. Just as ‘in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God’, so the Idea is in the First Intellect and is also with God ‘in every neighbouring intellectual being that is its image, or made according to its image’,<sup>469</sup> and the Idea that begets its own understanding is God himself.

### 2.2.2.3 The Human Intellect

#### a) The nature of the human intellect

The concept of the human intellect is specifically treated in Eckhart’s second commentary on Genesis, the *Book of the Parables of Genesis*.<sup>470</sup> His interpretation predominantly conforms to a parabolic reading of the scripture; as a result the three characters in Eden, ‘serpent, woman and man’, are seen as the symbols of man’s sensitive faculty, the inferior rational faculty and the superior rational faculty that is intellect. Eckhart holds that intellect is the highest faculty in man, and is the image of God in which man is made, thus stands for the substantial being of the human creature.

Moreover, the communication between ‘serpent’, ‘woman’ and ‘man’ indicates the natural constitution of our soul and the correlation between the three faculties within us. Eckhart makes the point that by reading scripture in parabolic fashion it is evident that this story of Genesis holds truth even in the literal sense, because the sensitive faculty truly and literally speaks to the inferior reason, the inferior rational faculty speaks to the superior reason, and the highest faculty speaks to God.<sup>471</sup> Likewise, the conversation between man and God, woman and man, and serpent and woman is an illustration of how God relates himself to creaturely beings. The sequence – God speaks

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<sup>469</sup> Eckhart, *In Ioh.* n.31 (LW III 24,16-25,1): ‘In ipso enim intellectu primo utique est ratio proprie; et est *apud deum*, in omni scilicet intellectivo proximo sibi, quod est imago sive ad imaginem suam, genus dei est, Act. 17.’ (Trans. Bernard McGinn in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 132.)

<sup>470</sup> Eckhart wrote two different commentaries on Genesis: *Expositio libri Genesis* and *Liber parabolarum Genesis*.

<sup>471</sup> Eckhart, *Par. Gen.* n.137 (LW I 1, 603,10-5): ‘Praeterea quarto apparebit quod in his verbis: serpens, mulier et vir exprimitur consistentia et natura humanae conditionis in sua constitutione quantum ad principia sua et eorum naturales proprietates, et quomodo serpens, sensitivum scilicet, verissime et ad litteram loquitur mulieri, inferiori scilicet rationalis, et quomodo illud inferius rationale loquitur suo superiori, et hoc supremum loquitur deo, et quomodo deus loquitur cum praemissis tribus.’ (Trans. Bernard McGinn in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 109.)

to man, man to woman, and woman to serpent – implies that God only addresses man's intellect in a direct manner, and whatever stands lower than intellective faculty can receive the word of God only through an intermediate.

The intellect in us conjoins man with God, in the sense that man, on the basis of the intellective faculty, is able to form an innermost communication with God. However, man's intellective conduct cannot do without the involvement of the sensitive faculty, because 'we cannot understand without phantasms' and our imagination is 'a movement produced by sensation'.<sup>472</sup> The sensitive faculty provides man's intellect with phantasm, so it is by nature subject to the intellective faculty. Eckhart maintains that possessing the sensitive faculty is proper to man for the sake of the integrity of human beings. By and large man is an intellectual being who lives with an innate sensitive faculty, which means that man ranks at the top in the order of corporeal and on the bottom in the order of intellectual beings.<sup>473</sup> The nature of the human intellect, therefore, indicates the border line between the corporeal beings, which are unable to distinguish things from the ideas, and the intellectual beings, which are totally free from matter and image.

Eckhart sometimes defines man by intellect rather than reason, especially with regard to the glory of God. He claims: 'Man is man through the intellect, to have an intellect is part of him and is proper to him, and the property of the intellect is to see the glory of God.'<sup>474</sup> Eckhart forsakes all other faculties and takes intellect alone as the recipient of God's glory.

#### *b) Intellect as pure receptive power*

To Eckhart intellect functions as pure receptive power, and knowing or understanding is radically reception. The mode of intellect's reception is particularly expounded in his commentary on *Exodus*, where he explains why the intellect does not receive things themselves, but their ideas or the likenesses of things. His explanation is unfolded

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<sup>472</sup> Eckhart, *Par. Gen.* n.138 (LW I 1, 604,7-9): 'Item nobis etiam »non« contingit »intelligere sine phantasmate«, sicut nec »texere vel aedificare« sine instrumentis corporalibus. »Phantasia autem est motus a sensu factus.«' (Trans. Bernard McGinn in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 109.)

<sup>473</sup> Eckhart, *In Ioh.* n.83 (LW III 71,4-8): 'Quantum vero ad ens creatum distinguit quattuor gradus entium in universo. Sunt enim in entibus primo gradu quae sunt tantum entia, secundo gradu sunt viventia, tertio gradu est intellectus humanus, quarto gradu est intellectus angelicus, et si quis sit alius a materia et phantasmate liber, separatus.' (Trans. Bernard McGinn in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 153.)

<sup>474</sup> Eckhart, *In Ex.* n.277 (LW II 223,4-6) (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Teacher and Preacher*, 1986, 128).

through an innovative exposition of the verse ‘Come up to me on the mountain, and be there’ (*Ex.* 24:12). Eckhart calls attention to the preposition ‘on’. ‘There, follows, “on the mountain”’. Note that he does not say “to the mountain”. The reason seems to be that love and the will look to the thing itself, and they take their stand and are at peace in it. But the intellect does not take its stand in the reality of the thing itself, but according to its name of “intellect”, it enters into the principle of the things and there receives the thing in its principles, in its root and origin.<sup>475</sup> To receive something in its principle, root and origin is to receive the idea of that thing which is precontained in the creator’s mind before the thing comes into existence. Eckhart clarifies the meaning of knowledge, and takes the idea of the thing as the exclusive source of knowledge, as he claims that nothing brings about knowledge other than the ‘what-it-is’ definition and idea of the thing itself.<sup>476</sup>

By fixing intellect to the principles of things, Eckhart pushes knowing to the same level as being, and to know something means to share the same being with something, as the Son knows the Father, or the image knows the exemplar, and vice versa. Eckhart affirms this rule by referring to the verse ‘No one knows the Son except the Father, nor does anyone know the Father except the Son’ (*Mt.* 11:27). The reason, Eckhart claims, is that the Father and Son are one in what they are, and nothing is known through what is alien to this oneness, thus the principles of knowing and of being are identified.<sup>477</sup> This echoes another oft-repeated rule, that only those who are in oneness with God will be able to know God. Eckhart gives the example of the just man and justice to illustrate this point: just as justice is known to itself alone and to the just man that has been taken up by justice, God is known to himself alone and to the man who is taken up in the divine. To be taken up in the divine means to receive God’s being, hence the scriptural text ‘No one knows who does not receive’ (*Rv.* 2:17).<sup>478</sup>

Just as the matter is to receive its proper form in nature, the operation of the intellect is to receive idea or form intrinsically. It is believed that in nature things come into being when matter receives form. In that process form as an active agent comes to its proper matter, and matter takes on its form and is thus informed. In that sense matter

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<sup>475</sup> Eckhart, *In Ex.* n.265 (LW II 213,11-4): ‘Sequitur: in montem. Nota: non ait ad montem. Ratio videtur: amor enim et voluntas ad rem ipsam respiciunt et in ipsa sistunt et quiescunt. Intellectus vero non sistit in re ipsa in se ipsa, sed iuxta nomen intellectus intrat ad ipsa rei principia et ibi rem accipit in principiis suis in radice et origine.’ (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Teacher and Preacher*, 1986, 125).

<sup>476</sup> Eckhart, *In Ioh.* n.11 (LW III 11,12-3) (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 126).

<sup>477</sup> *Ibid.* n.26 (LW III 21,3-5) (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 130).

<sup>478</sup> *Ibid.* n.15 (LW III 13,8-12) (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Essential Eckhart* [1981, 126-7]).

always functions as a passive recipient. And the purer, the better. Because the extent to which the substantial form is to be received depends on how pure the receptive power can be. So long as the recipient possesses something of its own, it is stained and thus cannot receive the substantial form itself. Only the pure receptive power is entitled to receive the substantial form itself, and that is precisely what it takes for the intellect to understand, to take in the idea of a substance. The distinctive power of intellect lies in its nature of formlessness; in other words, because intellect does not possess this or that form, therefore it has the capacity to receive all forms; because it ‘has nothing of its own’ therefore it ‘understands all things’.<sup>479</sup> According to Eckhart, the fundamental operation of the intellect is nothing but to serve as a pure receptive power that alone is proper to the substantial form itself. Fundamentally, the work of intellect or the process of understanding is to receive, not to pursue.<sup>480</sup>

Eckhart frequently mentions the limitedness of human knowledge, and he probes into the fundamental differences between God’s knowledge and human knowledge of things. This line of thought gains a focused expression in his lengthy exposition of the biblical verse ‘Almighty is his name’ (*Ex.* 15:3). He holds that knowledge in the Godhead is substance, whereas in man it is a quality. It belongs to God to denominate a thing according to its completed work, and in God existence and knowledge are the same. Our knowledge, in contrast, arises from the senses, and we name things according to the manner in which we know them. Therefore ‘the distinction of divine attributes such as power, wisdom, goodness and the like, is totally within our intellect’s way of grasping, or on the side of the intellect that receives and draws knowledge of such things from and through creatures.’<sup>481</sup> On this point Eckhart disagrees with Thomas, because to Thomas the perfections we attribute to God still have ground in the divine.<sup>482</sup> It follows that anyone who would see God himself through himself would see a single perfection and would see all perfections in it and through it rather than it through them. As to God’s way of knowing, Eckhart particularly mentions Thomas’s wonderful

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<sup>479</sup> Eckhart, *In Ioh.* n.100 (LW III 86,14-5) (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 160).

<sup>480</sup> Eckhart mentions that all the work of the active intellect serves the purpose of preparing itself for God. Once God takes over, man’s intellect must become passive. See Walshe, Sermon 3, *The Complete Mystical Works of Meister Eckhart*, trans. and ed. by Maurice O’C Walshe (New York, 2009), 46-54.

<sup>481</sup> Eckhart, *In Ex.* nn. 58 (LW II 64,1-3): ‘Constat enim quod distinctio attributorum divinarum, potentiae scilicet, sapientiae, bonitatis et huiusmodi, totaliter est ex parte intellectus accipientis et colligentis cognitionem talium ex creaturis et per creaturas.’ (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Teacher and Preacher*, 1986, 63).

<sup>482</sup> Thomas, *Summa Theol.*, I, q.13, a.4.

saying about the ‘knowledge of vision’.<sup>483</sup> Eckhart notices that Thomas usually takes ‘the ‘knowledge of vision’ (*scientia visionis*) as knowledge of finite things, meaning that it concerns only those really existing things and does not pertain to things in potency. By contrast, the ‘knowledge of simple understanding’ (*scientia simplicis intelligentiae*) embraces all that is possible. That is the explanation Thomas gives in *Summa Contra Gentiles* I, q.69 and elsewhere. Only in *Summa Theol.* I, q.14, a.12 does Thomas present a daring exposition of the ‘knowledge of vision’, one that he never repeated. There Thomas claims that if we consider more attentively, God knows infinite things even by the ‘knowledge of vision’. What he means is that if we take into consideration the thoughts and affections of hearts which are invisible to us but can be known by God, it follows that the ‘knowledge of vision’ is no more confined to the finite, because the thoughts and affections ‘will be multiplied to infinity as rational creatures go on for ever’. This statement, which implies that even things in act are infinite, is highly regarded by Eckhart. Such a daring claim puts the Catholic faith in jeopardy.<sup>484</sup>

Despite his inclination to treat creatures as infinite, Eckhart addresses the limitedness of man’s knowledge. This leads us to the so-called mystic side of Eckhart, who repeatedly resorts to Maimonides and Dionysius and asserts the principle that man ascends to knowledge of God through *removal*: what God is remains hidden and covered at the end. When commenting on ‘Moses went into the darkness, wherein God was’ (*Ex.* 20:21), Eckhart employs terms such as ‘perfect ignorance’ and ‘splendent darkness’; he admits that when our intellect strives to apprehend the creator, it finds a great wall dividing him from us. God is truly hidden from us in cloud and darkness.<sup>485</sup>

c) *The mutual glance between man’s intellect and God*

To Eckhart it is only through intellect that the divine communication with God is to be formed in man. In his *Commentary on Exodus*, Eckhart draws a conclusion that the essential vision of God is impossible for a created intellect on the basis of its natural powers, and becomes possible only by supernatural aid. Thus when Moses begs, ‘Show me your face’, it is significant that he prefixes it with ‘If I have found grace in your

<sup>483</sup> Eckhart, *In Ex.* n. 86 (LW II 89,9-10) (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Teacher and Preacher*, 1986, 73).

<sup>484</sup> See Markus Vinzent, *The Art of Detachment* (2011), 3.

<sup>485</sup> Eckhart, *In Ex.* n. 237 (LW II 196,1-15) (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Teacher and Preacher*, 1986, 117-8).

sight' (*Ex.* 33:13).<sup>486</sup> Eckhart asserts that the 'mutual glance between God and the height of the soul is completely natural, full of truth and delight', because it is founded 'in the root and source of all good, namely order'.<sup>487</sup> That natural order, Eckhart assumes, 'is one in which the highest point of what is inferior touches the lowest point of its superior',<sup>488</sup> and by that mutual touch the superior illuminates the inferior and manifests everything it has to the inferior.<sup>489</sup> That is the way God beholds the intellect and unfolds himself to us. This opening up indicates God's speaking to us, which, according to Eckhart, is nothing else 'but God's becoming known to us through his gifts'.<sup>490</sup>

Although God speaks to all things and he speaks all things, his word is not to be understood by all. Some beings receive it in and through existence, some in and through life; only the highest beings hear God in and through existence, life and understanding.<sup>491</sup> Eckhart stresses the hierarchical state of the three: to be, to live, and to know. He claims that these three exhaust the totality of being. Despite the most fundamental status

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<sup>486</sup> Eckhart, *In Ex.* n. 281 (LW II 226,5-6) (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Teacher and Preacher*, 1986, 129).

<sup>487</sup> Eckhart, *Par. Gen.* n.139 (LW I 1, 606,11-607,2): 'Iste autem ordo et respectus mutuus dei et supremi animae naturalissimus est, verissimus est et dulcissimus est, utpote convenientissimus et fundatus in radice et fonte omnis boni, qui est ordo.' (Trans. Bernard McGinn in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 110.)

<sup>488</sup> *Ibid.* n.139 (LW I 1, 605,12-606,1): 'Ordo enim ipse est qui facit bonum, adeo quod impossibile est esse bonum sine ordine, et e converso impossibile est esse malum, ubi ordo est. Ordo autem naturalis est, ut supremum inferioris attingat infimum sui superioris. Supremum autem animae in nobis intellectus est.' (Trans. Bernard McGinn in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 109-10.)

<sup>489</sup> *Ibid.* n.146 (LW I 1, 615,5-616,3): 'Is est ipse attactus mutuus, quo superius aspicit inferius et e converso. In hoc autem attactu et occurs mutuo se osculantur et amplexantur naturali et essentiali amore superius et inferius. Quin immo ipse attactus mutuus, quo superius aspicit inferius et e converso ipsum inferius respicit ad aspectum superioris, vox est et verbum, locutio et dictio et nomen, quo innotescit superius inferiori et se illi pandit, aperit et manifestat; manifestat, inquam, omnia quae in se sunt, Ioh. 16: "omnia, quae habet pater, mea sunt"; et Ioh. 15: "omnia, quaecumque audivi a patre meo, nota feci vobis". Manifestat autem se ipso et se ipsum. Et hoc est quod doctores dicunt angelos superiores illuminare inferiores quantum ad omnia, quae cognoscunt naturaliter.'

'This is the mutual touch in which the superior gazes on the inferior and vice versa. They kiss and embrace each other in this touch and encounter with a love that is natural and essential. Indeed, the shared touch by which the superior beholds the inferior and the inferior returns the superior's gaze is the voice and word, utterance and speech and name, by which the superior recognizes the inferior and unfolds, opens and manifests itself to it. I say that it manifests everything that it has. "All the things that the Father has are mine." (Jn.16:15); "All the things I have heard from my Father I have made known to you" (Jn. 15:15). It manifests itself by itself, and this is what the doctors say about the higher angels illuminating the lower regarding everything they know in natural fashion.' (Trans. Bernard McGinn in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 113.)

<sup>490</sup> *Ibid.* n.150 (LW I 1, 619,6-9): 'His igitur diffuse praemissis colligendo breviter dicendum quod deum nobis loqui non est aliud prorsus quam donis suis nobis innotescere, donis suis et inspirationibus, sive naturalibus sive gratuitis, nos excitare et mentes nostras suo lumine irradiare.' (Trans. Bernard McGinn in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 114-5.)

<sup>491</sup> *Ibid.* n.151 (LW I 1, 621,9-11): 'Suprema vero in entibus ipsum audiunt deum non solum per esse et in esse, aut per vivere et in vivere, sed per intelligere et in ipso intelligere.' (Trans. Bernard McGinn in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 115.)

of 'to be' in the abstract sense, the situation is reversed in the concrete, where being holds the lowest place, living being the second place, and intelligent being the third or highest place. A mere being is less perfect than a living being because the former is included in the latter. On the same account, an intelligent being is deemed more perfect and noble than a living being. Eckhart specifically points out that the reason for the superiority of one over another lies in the kind of existence the superior includes, rather than its own existence. In addition, the inferior 'exists in a more noble fashion and a more perfect way in what is its superior by essential order'.<sup>492</sup> Man undoubtedly falls into the category of the highest beings, which hold the capacity to receive God by means of understanding. Thus the word of God is heard on the ground of intellect, meaning God becomes known to man.

But God's becoming known to us is not based solely on man's intellectual power; it also entails the role of grace. By the aid of the natural gifts and divine intervention, man gains some knowledge of God. It is through the gifts either of nature or of grace that we are raised up and our minds are illuminated by the light from on high. 'For us to speak to God is nothing else but to hear and obey him and his inspiration, to turn away from other things and turn toward him and his likeness.'<sup>493</sup> Moreover Eckhart claims that it is through grace that man is redirected to God after sin. The correct condition of man lies in his conformance with the natural order in creation, in the sense that man adheres to God by the intellect, the inferior reason in turn cleaves to the superior reason, and the sensitive faculty to the inferior reason.<sup>494</sup> In that way God draws all the three to himself. The more the intellect adheres to God himself, the more submissive the sensitive faculty and the inferior rational faculty become.<sup>495</sup> So long as the intellect holds fast to God, what is below the intellectual faculty will naturally obey and adhere to what is superior to itself.

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<sup>492</sup> Eckhart, *In Ioh.* n.63 (LW III 53,4-5): 'Tertio notandum quod inferius nobilius et perfectiori modo est in suo superiori ordine essentiali.' (Trans. Bernard McGinn in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 144.)

<sup>493</sup> Eckhart, *Par. Gen.*, n.150 (LW I 1, 619,11-620,2), 'Nos autem deo loqui non est aliud quam ipsum et eius inspirationem audire et oboedire, ab aliis autem averti et ad ipsum et ipsius assimilationem converti, quomodo montes aliqui et loca respondent et loquuntur sibi loquentibus, sicut patet in sono.' (Trans. Bernard McGinn in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 115.)

<sup>494</sup> *Ibid.* n.143 (LW I 1, 612,1-3): '»Haec fuit« et est »rectitudo hominis«, quando sensitivum oboedit rationi inferiori et ad ipsam respicit et ordinatur et illa subhaeret et adhaeret rationi superiori et ipsa deo.' (Trans. Bernard McGinn in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 112.)

<sup>495</sup> *Ibid.* n.145 (LW I 1, 613,7-8): 'Tunc enim, quo magis adhaeret supremum animae ipsi deo, tanto magis sibi oboedit inferius se, etiam sensitivum.' (Trans. Bernard McGinn in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 112.)



The mutual glance and communication between the superior and the inferior are utterance, speech and word in the most proper and pleasing sense, to which the exterior utterance, speech and word do not compare.<sup>496</sup> This is because the exterior discourse or speech is no more than a trace, an analogous assimilation of that true utterance occurring in the innermost depth of all beings.

### **2.3 Eckhart the Friar: Expounding the Role of the Intellect in Spiritual Practice through Sermons**

Eckhart's enduring legacy to Christian spirituality is preserved chiefly in his sermons, of which some are delivered in scholastic Latin and others in Middle High German, the vernacular of the time. His Latin sermons are hardly differentiated from his biblical commentaries, being scholastic in style and exegetical in nature. For that reason Eckhart integrates them into the third book of his *Opus Tripartitum*, namely the *Book of Commentaries*. As a result, the third book of *Opus Tripartitum* is divided into two equally important portions, commentaries and sermons, and in both we see Eckhart's detailed expositions of scripture.<sup>497</sup>

Meanwhile, it is through his vernacular homilies that Eckhart has been remembered as a powerful preacher, down through the history of Christian theology. It is noteworthy that even when preaching in the vernacular Eckhart never seems to have neglected the exegetical framework that he intends to establish in his *Opus Tripartitum*. Rather, he conscientiously seeks the scriptural ground for his words: the topic of each of the vernacular homilies is derived from a well-known scriptural verse, which usually forms the opening sentence of the respective sermon. On the basis of the above observations we come to the conclusion that Eckhart's Latin and vernacular sermons are both fundamentally exegetical in nature, despite the differences in language and style. Overall the level of technical complexity demonstrated in his commentaries is thoroughly maintained in his Latin sermons, whereas in his German homilies poetic images and metaphors such as 'spark', 'ground', 'seed' and 'the birth of the son' start to play a predominant role. Nonetheless, in both Eckhart calls upon the reader and the

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<sup>496</sup> Eckhart, *Par. Gen.* n.150 (LW I 1, 619,9-10): 'Et haec est propriissima et dulcissima locutio, sermo vel verbum, cuius exterior locutio, sermo et verbum ignobile est.' (Trans. Bernard McGinn in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 115.)

<sup>497</sup> Eckhart, *Prologus generalis in Opus Tripartitum* n.6 (LW I 1, 151,7-12) (trans. Armand A. Maurer in *Parisian Questions and Prologues*, 1974, 81-2).

audience to focus on the issues concerning Christian life and spiritual practice as stated in the sacred scripture. In the case of Eckhart, if we take the sermon as the typical form of preaching to the public, we ought probably to put those scholastic Latin sermons aside and concentrate instead on the vernacular homilies, which were originally delivered by Eckhart himself and later on transcribed by another hand. Although the authenticity of these vernacular sermons has been established by the collective work of scholars over the last five decades or more,<sup>498</sup> the accuracy of the transcripts will still be open to question. This issue was initially addressed by Eckhart himself in his *Defense* to the Bull of condemnation, where he pointed out that ‘even learned and studious clerics take down what they hear frequently and indiscriminately in a false and abbreviated way’,<sup>499</sup> and firmly refused to be held responsible for the sixteen articles ascribed to him, all of which were derived from his German sermons.

Compared with the *quaestiones* and commentaries and those equally sophisticated Latin sermons enclosed in *Opus Tripartitum*, the vernacular homilies ascribed to Eckhart have wider appeal, especially to those who hold spiritual aspirations and thus always give priority to spiritual progress. The main purpose of delivering a sermon is to grip the mind of the audience in a straightforward manner so that they can be instantly touched and inspired. For that reason the efficiency or the force of the language must be taken into full consideration; naturally metaphors and imagery are to be embraced, and elements of discursive and analytical style to be reduced. In fulfilling his pastoral duties such as preaching to the public, a friar such as Eckhart does not necessarily deliver a new message; what he intends is rather the renewal of an old message that may have been continuously transmitted within the same tradition. Indeed, a closer examination of these seemingly outspoken sermons makes it clear that, with regard to spiritual practice, for example grace and the divine life within us, Eckhart is not saying something radically new; his message is very close to that of other scholastics of his age, for instance, Dietrich von Freiberg.<sup>500</sup> Recent studies which give more thought to

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<sup>498</sup> See Bernard McGinn’s Foreword to Maurice O’C Walshe’s translation and edition of *The Complete Mystical Works of Meister Eckhart* (New York, 2009), xvi.

<sup>499</sup> Eckhart, *Responsio* n.127 (LW V 293,17-20), (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 74).

<sup>500</sup> Oliver Davies highlights the intellectual legacy that Meister Eckhart received from the German Dominican school. He briefly goes through Dietrich von Freiberg’s thought on the human intellect, and points out that in Meister Dietrich we see an explicit identification of the Augustinian *abditum mentis* (the secret interior of the mind) with the Aristotelian agent intellect; thus intellect becomes the essential soul itself. On that basis Davies makes the point that Eckhart’s understanding of the human intellect is

the mystic<sup>501</sup> side of Eckhart, such as that of Oliver Davies, are inclined to demonstrate that the appealing power of Eckhart's sermons consists in his verbal and imagistic expressivity. And these free-floating dynamic images employed in his sermons, in turn, convey the sense of a personal spiritual vision of immense energy.<sup>502</sup>

Admittedly, Eckhart's sermons are charged with his personal insights into Christian spirituality, which may invoke the need to look particularly into his personal spiritual vision or even his so-called mystical experience. But we should not forget that Eckhart is by no means the sort of mystic who lends himself to the uncontrollable ecstasy,<sup>503</sup> nor does he ever intend to promote something *personal*. On the contrary Eckhart urges everyone, including himself, to break away from personhood, meaning to stop being *this* or *that* person so as to let the personal identity perish completely in God. In Eckhart the focus is always on the divine ground which speaks of the utmost commonality, and personhood or personal identity indicates only a hindrance to knowing God, thus should be overcome by all means, because the death of one's personhood, like a seed perishing in the soil, will usher in a new life in God, as stated in scripture (*Jn. 12:24*).<sup>504</sup>

Viewing from a hermeneutical perspective, it is not hard to see that Eckhart never disputes the divine origin and the holy nature of scripture. For him scripture is the

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heavily indebted to the Albertian school, in particular Albert the Great and Dietrich von Freiberg. For details, see Oliver Davies, *Meister Eckhart: Mystical Theologian* (London, 1991), 85-99.

<sup>501</sup> It is still open to question whether it is appropriate to call Eckhart a mystic. Some scholars, such as Heribert Fischer and Kurt Flasch, refuse to attach the epithet 'mystic' to Eckhart. Disagreement on this issue derives partly from the different approaches to Eckhart's work, and is also related to the ambiguity surrounding the definition of mystic. Bernard McGinn defines mystic in terms of consciousness rather than experience; from his perspective a mystic is one who attains the consciousness of God's presence. See *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart* (New York, 2001), 132; *The Foundation of Mysticism* (London, 1992), General Introduction, xi-xx; *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism* (New York, 2006), Introduction, xvi.

Reiner Schürmann is not satisfied with those definitions of mysticism that derive the mystical experience from the arrival at consciousness of an all-encompassing being. In his study of Eckhart, Schürmann offers a different approach, which is to define mysticism as the reciprocity between existence and thought; in other words, a genuine understanding of detachment/releasement is convertible with a detached/released existence. It is worth noting that Schürmann takes 'releasement' as the most appropriate translation of '*Gelassenheit*', based on an examination of that key term in both Eckhart and Heidegger. See Reiner Schürmann, *Meister Eckhart: Mystic and Philosopher* (Bloomington & London, 1978), Introduction xii-xv.

<sup>502</sup> Oliver Davies, *Meister Eckhart: Mystical Theologian* (1991), 156.

<sup>503</sup> Eckhart's detachment includes detaching from internal images. This point has been particularly stressed by the Korean scholar H. S. Keel in his comparative study of Eckhart's thinking with Zen Buddhism. See H. S. Keel, *Meister Eckhart: an Asian perspective* (Louvain, 2007). Eckhart is also distinct from Augustine with regard to spiritual itinerary. For detailed comparison of Eckhart's seven stages with Augustine's six stages, see Markus Vinzent, *The Art of Detachment* (2011), 138-91.

<sup>504</sup> This sermon focuses on a typically Eckhartian theme – the three deaths of the soul. It was first edited by Josef Jostes (1895) as no. 82, but somehow not included in the edition and translation of Walshe (2009). The second part was translated by Oliver Davies as no. 30 in *Meister Eckhart: Selected Writings* (London, 1994), 244-5.

concrete manifestation of the divine presence, thus serves as the measure of our personal viewpoints as well as religious experience. Eckhart explicitly orients his thoughts towards scripture, in the sense that he bases both his academic output (propositions, *quaestiones* and commentaries, including his Latin sermons) and his oral presentation (vernacular sermons) on a solid scriptural ground, in both cases drawing heavily on passages selected from the two Testaments.

It is noteworthy that among the selected scriptural texts, the proportion of the two Testaments is reversed in the commentaries and the sermons. According to the manuscripts discovered to date, we have only one piece of Eckhart's commentary on the New Testament, his *Commentary on John*; all of the rest are on the Old Testament. In his sermons, we see a much larger portion of texts drawn from the New Testament, especially the three gospels according to Matthew, John and Luke and the Pauline Epistles. Therefore at least in terms of scriptural sources, in his sermons Eckhart shifts the focus of attention to the New Testament. Consequently questions concerning Christology or Christian spirituality are brought to the centre, and topics such as how God gives birth to the Son in the soul and how the soul achieves union with God come to the fore.

To summarise, it is chiefly through his sermons that Eckhart gives his insights into the spiritual journey as revealed in scripture. Nevertheless, the practical elements contained in his sermons do not stand alone, but rather resonate with the theoretical discussions unfolded in his sophisticated *quaestiones* and commentaries. The parallels we find between his *quaestiones*, commentaries and sermons underline that a versatile master like Eckhart is perfectly capable of expressing the same idea in discursive argumentation and through metaphoric images. What the Dominican friar<sup>505</sup> preaches from the pulpit echoes what he has taught at the University of Paris and elsewhere as a scholastic theologian.

With a focus on the intellect, we will look at how the Eckhartian notion of intellect is unfolded in his sermonic corpus. For that purpose two aspects will be addressed: 1) intellect as the temple of God; and 2) intellect as the key to detachment.

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<sup>505</sup> C. H. Lawrence explores the social economic context of the 12<sup>th</sup> century and points out that the orders of mendicant friars that appeared in the early years of the thirteenth century represented a new departure, a radical break away from the monastic tradition of the past. Preaching and ministering to the people thus became the duty of the friars. They abandoned the seclusion and enclosure of the cloister so as to engage in an active pastoral mission to the society of their time. For details, see C. H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism - forms of religious life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages* (London, 2001), 238-78.

### 2.3.1 Intellect as the Temple of God

The notion of intellect remains one of the major themes running through Eckhart's sermons. The thesis 'intellect is the temple of God', which he puts forward particularly in *Sermon 9* (W67)<sup>506</sup> strikingly parallels what is stated in *Parisian Question 1* and *Commentary on John*. In his *Parisian Question 1* Eckhart reverses the Thomistic order and insists that God is the intellect and knowing is prior to being in the divine. Similarly, in his *Commentary on John* Eckhart identifies intellect with the Principle, in which nothing but the eternal Word dwells.<sup>507</sup> In line with *Parisian Question 1* and *Commentary on John*, *Sermon 9* (W67) speaks of the intellect and is rendered in the same top-down order. Eckhart starts with a definition of God 'as an intellect that lives solely by understanding itself',<sup>508</sup> and then moves on to the discussion of the soul where the human intellect is located.

As in his Latin works, Eckhart maintains the logic of proceeding from the divine intellect to the human intellect. But in his sermons Eckhart renders his thought in poetic language. In this one he states that the soul 'has a tiny drop of intellect, a little spark, a twig'.<sup>509</sup> Unlike other powers of the soul,<sup>510</sup> this little spark holds the capacity to take God stripped of goodness and being, to dwell in his temple, namely in the divine intellect, in which 'His own knowing knows himself in himself'.<sup>511</sup> Hence beatitude lies in intellect rather than will. This Dominican stance, which Eckhart has affirmed in *Parisian Question 3*, reverberates in many of his sermons, and is often uttered more bluntly. Here in *Sermon 9* (W67) Eckhart expresses it straightforwardly in an ego-statement: 'I am blessed only because God is intellectual and I know it'.<sup>512</sup>

To properly understand this statement, we need to take into account the reduplicating formula *in quantum* or 'insofar as'. In his *Defense* Eckhart urges the investigators to keep this formula in mind, and clarifies what he means by it. The expression 'insofar

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<sup>506</sup> Eckhart's German sermons are numbered in various ways; I will adopt Quint's numbering and gives its order in Walshe's translation in brackets. For details concerning the different ways of ordering, see the Table of Concordance in Walshe (ed., trans.), *The Complete Mystical Works of Meister Eckhart* (2009), 591-3. It will be abridged as *Mystical Eckhart* in the following footnotes.

<sup>507</sup> Eckhart, *In Ioh.* n.38 (LW III 32) (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 135).

<sup>508</sup> Eckhart, *Pr. 9* (DW I 142,6-7) (trans. Walshe in *Mystical Eckhart*, 2009, 341).

<sup>509</sup> Eckhart, *Pr. 9* (DW I 151,1-2) (trans. Walshe in *Mystical Eckhart*, 2009, 343).

<sup>510</sup> Thomas deals with this issue in his *Summa Theol.* I, q.77.

<sup>511</sup> Eckhart, *Pr. 9* (DW I 150,7) (trans. Walshe in *Mystical Eckhart*, 2009, 343).

<sup>512</sup> Eckhart, *Pr. 9* (DW I 153,11-2) (trans. Walshe in *Mystical Eckhart*, 2009, 344).

as', Eckhart explains, is radically a reduplication that serves to exclude from the respective term everything that is foreign to it.<sup>513</sup> Admittedly the typical Eckhartian formula *in quantum* is not always employed literally in the vernacular sermons as in his Latin works; nevertheless, by applying the formula to these sermons, their depth and richness will be brought to light. To take the aforementioned ego-statement, 'I am blessed only because God is intellectual and I know it' as an example, in accordance with the reduplicating formula we may paraphrase as follows: 'I am blessed only because God is intellectual and I know it, insofar as the intellect is concerned, insofar as I am no other than the intellect which is a power in the soul that touches neither time nor flesh.' With the aid of his *in quantum* formula, we come to see that by the term 'I' Eckhart means to speak of the incorporeal power of the human intellect. Thus it becomes clear that in preaching these sermons Eckhart is actually talking about the divine, spiritual things in terms of the intellectual concept; if one takes his words in material terms, their subtlety will be missed. This point is precisely what his opponents fail to grasp.<sup>514</sup>

Following the principle that beatitude lies in knowing,<sup>515</sup> Eckhart gives a vivid account of how God works in the soul, or more precisely, in the intellective power of the soul. Thus arises his doctrine of the birth of the Son in the soul. Through this doctrine Eckhart brings the creation back into the soul, presenting an entirely interiorised version of creation. This theme runs throughout his sermons. We will not survey all of them here, but we take one example to illustrate this point. Let us look at the oft-mentioned *Sermon 2* (W8), in which Eckhart freely renders the Latin *mulier* (woman) as 'virgin and wife', and plays upon the German word *empfangen*, which can mean both 'received' and 'conceived'.<sup>516</sup> By means of such free-rendering of words Eckhart makes the point that the good gifts that are received in virginity should be reborn back into God in wifely fruitfulness. Not only is the eternal Father ever begetting his eternal Son without pause in this power of the soul, namely the intellect, but this power of the soul 'jointly begets the Father's Son and itself, this self-same Son, in the

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<sup>513</sup> Eckhart, *Responsio* n.81 (LW V 277,7-8) (trans Bernard McGinn in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 72).

<sup>514</sup> Eckhart, *Responsio* n.125 (LW V 293,5-9) (trans Bernard McGinn in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 74).

<sup>515</sup> Eckhart gives different expression in *Sermon 52*, as will be discussed later. In this sermon Eckhart mentions the ground from which intellect and will derive. It follows that beatitude lies in neither knowing nor loving, but in the source of knowledge and love.

<sup>516</sup> As pointed out by Walshe, Eckhart's rendering is very free, as the Latin says nothing about a virgin. See footnotes 1 and 2, in *Mystical Eckhart* (2009), 81.

sole power of the Father'.<sup>517</sup> Thus we have a circular rather than a one-way track. On the one hand, God is begetting his Only-Begotten Son in this power (intellect) of the soul; on the other hand, this power (intellect) of the soul gives birth to the same Only-Begotten Son and itself with the Father and in the power of the Father. This circular way of presentation will make sense only to one who is able to grasp the logic that underpins Eckhart's sermons, which can be summed up as follows: intellect is the light of spirit, thus the intellectual is no less than the spiritual, and the spiritual or the divine things can be best spoken of in intellectual terms. Following the identification of the spiritual with the intellectual, it becomes easier to understand that in the spiritual realm, to receive means to conceive, reception is conception. In other words, the knowing power (intellect of the soul) is one with what is known (which is God himself); it is also conformed to what is known, and in turn, gives rise to new knowledge. Hence the receiver does not remain a receiver, but is developed into a giver and brings what it has received back to the First giver with all thanks and gratitude. What Eckhart means by 'virgin' is the receiver, and by 'wife' the giver; the logic of his expression 'the virgin who is a wife' is that in spiritual journey we proceed from being a receiver to being a giver, and we must first become a perfect receiver so as to reach maturity and become a giver ourselves. The more we give, the better we receive, and vice versa.

The mature giver, which is indicative of the virtue of wifely fruitfulness in *Sermon* 2, resonates with what Eckhart says in the Latin *Sermon* VI: 'God's nature, existence, and life consist in sharing himself and giving himself totally.'<sup>518</sup> Through the two words 'himself' and 'totally' Eckhart makes it clear that what God gives us is not something less or other than God; he gives himself totally in the sense that God made the soul according to himself and gives birth to the Only-Begotten Son in the soul. In *Sermon* 24 (W92) Eckhart mentions a fundamental difference between the soul and other things created by God. He explains that God generally made all things according to an image of all things that he has *in* himself, but the soul was not made according to an image in himself, nor according to something coming forth from him, but according to himself, that is to say, according to all that he is in his nature, his being, his activity which flows forth yet remains within.<sup>519</sup> Of course God is in all things, but nowhere is God present,

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<sup>517</sup> Eckhart, *Pr.* 2 (DW I 32, 6-8), (trans. Walshe in *Mystical Eckhart* [2009], 79).

<sup>518</sup> Eckhart, *Sermo* VI, n. 55 (LW IV 55), (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Teacher and Preacher* [1986], 213).

<sup>519</sup> Eckhart, *Pr.* 24 (DW I 415,11-7) (trans. Frank Tobin in *Teacher and Preacher*, 1986, 284-5).

as divine and intelligent just as he is in himself, so intensively as in the soul; to be precise, in the innermost and the highest part of the soul, and the innermost is the highest.<sup>520</sup> Since God made the soul in accordance with this out-flowing, inward-remaining work, it follows that the soul shares one ground, one spirit, and one being with God.

Based on the principle of oneness between the soul and God, Eckhart affirms the controversial doctrine he often preaches to the public: ‘There is something above the created nature of the soul.’ In addition, he claims there is no such thing as truth so far as the soul’s created nature is concerned.<sup>521</sup> Evidently Eckhart admits the created nature of the soul,<sup>522</sup> but he refuses to take createdness as the whole nature of the soul. His doctrine of the soul lays emphasis rather on that ‘something’ which is higher than createdness and creatableness. The uncreated nature of this ‘something’ is not a result of creation, but is derived from the union of the soul with God. On the ground of this union or oneness, Eckhart claims the likeness of the soul to the divine. The soul is so related to God and one with God that it is *really* like God, which means that like God the soul has nothing in common with anything, as it is God’s property and nature that he is dissimilar and is like no one.<sup>523</sup> And the soul’s likeness to God can only be fully realised through the Word incarnate.

The subtlety of this Eckhartian doctrine is not easily to be grasped; as Eckhart tells us in the sermons, many priests of his time fail to see the truthfulness of his teaching. In order to articulate and justify this seemingly heretical saying, Eckhart resorts to John’s gospel for scriptural support. He picks the verse ‘Everything that I have heard from my father I have revealed it to you’ (*Jn.15:15*), and overtly challenges the interpretation given by some priests, ‘who are certainly very learned and want to be important, but are so easily satisfied and let themselves be fooled in how they take these words’ of our Lord.<sup>524</sup> According to them, the verse ‘Everything that I have heard from my father I have revealed it to you’ means that God has revealed to us on the earth as much as is necessary for attaining eternal happiness, an interpretation that is firmly refuted by Eckhart. In order to resolve this sort of misunderstanding and

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<sup>520</sup> Eckhart, *Pr.* 30 (DW II 95,3-5) (trans. Frank Tobin in *Teacher and Preacher*, 1986, 292).

<sup>521</sup> *Ibid.* *Pr.* 29 (DW II 88,3-5) (trans. Frank Tobin in *Teacher and Preacher*, 1986, 290).

<sup>522</sup> In his *Responsio (Defense)* Eckhart expounds at length what he means by the uncreated nature of the soul. See Raymond Bernard Blakney, *Meister Eckhart: a modern translation* (New York, 1941), 269.

<sup>523</sup> Eckhart, *Pr.* 29 (DW II 89,6-7) (trans. Frank Tobin in *Teacher and Preacher*, 1986, 290).

<sup>524</sup> Eckhart, *Pr.* 29 (DW II 83,4-7) (trans. Frank Tobin in *Teacher and Preacher*, 1986, 289).



misinterpretation, he poses the question: Why did God become man? To which Eckhart gives his answer: ‘So that I might be born the same. God died so that I might die to the whole world and to all created things.’<sup>525</sup> It is in this way that one should understand our Lord’s words: ‘Everything that I have heard from my father I have revealed it to you.’ If one asks what the Son hears from his Father, the answer will be: to be born like the Father, because the Father can do nothing but give birth, and the Son can do nothing but be born. Thus we see the logical proceeding Eckhart follows in this doctrine: first the Father brings forth in his Only-Begotten Son *completely* what he has and is; and in the same manner the Son reveals to us *all* he has heard from the Father. Therefore we are the same Only-Begotten Son, no less.<sup>526</sup> To push this one step further, Eckhart urges us to see that the intellect, the light of spirit which enables us to receive God as he is in himself, does not remain as the Son, but joins the Father to give birth to the same Only-Begotten Son and to itself.

To Eckhart the birth of the Son in the soul is followed by the penetration of the soul into the divine ground. This kind of spiritual break-through calls for a perfect, thorough and radical indistinction, whereby whatever concept might preserve a distinction ought to be removed, hence the daring statement: ‘I pray to God to make me free of God’, so long as God is taken as the origin of creature.<sup>527</sup> On this point Eckhart’s thinking goes beyond creation and extends to precreation, where the essence of God is to be considered above causality. By removing the distinction of cause and effect, God is not taken as the cause of myself. On this basis, Eckhart declares: ‘I am my own cause according to my essence, which is eternal, and not according to my becoming, which is temporal.’<sup>528</sup> To speak in terms of eternity and according to the unborn mode, Eckhart confronts us with the almost incomprehensible thesis: my mortal existence by virtue of birth must die and perish with time; in my birth all things were born, hence I was the cause of myself and all things, and even the cause of God’s being God.<sup>529</sup> This brings us back to *Sermon 2* (W8), where Eckhart talks about the Solitary One, or the citadel in the soul from which proceeds the powers of the soul such as intellect and will and the Trinitarian persons. In *Sermon 2* (W8) Eckhart manages to formulate this message in a

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<sup>525</sup> Eckhart, *Pr. 29* (DW II 84, 1-3) (trans. Frank Tobin in *Teacher and Preacher*, 1986, 289).

<sup>526</sup> Eckhart, *Pr. 29* (DW II 84, 6-9) (trans. Frank Tobin in *Teacher and Preacher*, 1986, 289).

<sup>527</sup> Eckhart, *Pr. 52* (DW II 493,7-9) (trans. Walshe in *Mystical Eckhart*, 2009, 422).

<sup>528</sup> Eckhart, *Pr. 52* (DW II 502,9-503,1-2) (trans. Walshe in *Mystical Eckhart*, 2009, 424).

<sup>529</sup> Eckhart, *Pr. 52* (DW II 504,2-3) (trans. Walshe in *Mystical Eckhart*, 2009, 424).

poetic language; we read: ‘So truly one and simple is this citadel, so mode-and power-transcending is this solitary One, that neither power nor mode can gaze into it, nor even God himself!’<sup>530</sup> That is to say, insofar as God exists in modes and in the properties of his persons, he stays outside this One. To see inside God must rid himself of the divine names and personal properties. Only insofar as he is one and indivisible, without mode or properties, can he have a glance of this Solitary One. In that sense God is neither Father, Son, nor Holy Ghost, and yet is a Something which is neither this nor that.<sup>531</sup> So far as this Solitary One is concerned, beatitude lies in neither intellect nor will, but in the ground from which knowing and love derive.

### 2.3.2 Intellect as the Key to Detachment

Detachment is undoubtedly one of the themes that are typically Eckhartian. Generally speaking this radical detachment is regarded as the condition for the soul’s returning to the Godhead. Bernard McGinn takes detaching as one of the three activities –detaching, birthing and breaking-through – involved in this spiritual journey, and detaching and birthing as the two sides of one coin, rather than two subsequent stages. As for the breaking-through into the ground of the divine, McGinn highlights the role of the intellect as Eckhart frequently preached in the vernacular sermons, for instance, *Sermon 48* (W60), where Eckhart declares the intellect is not content with the divine being in terms of Father Son and Spirit, but has to penetrate into the simple ground, the desert, or the *cause* of this God.<sup>532</sup> Having clarified this point, McGinn makes two points with regard to an oversimplified intellectualist view. First, Eckhart’s view of the intellectual act that makes us one with God involves an unmediated and direct vision of God and the soul as one with God. It is not the kind of reflexive act of understanding that we are accustomed to in knowing something and being able to reflect on what we know. As Eckhart declares at the end of the *Sermon On the Nobleman*, the ultimate blessedness of heaven (and by extension our direct knowing of God in this life) does not consist in a reflex act of knowing by which we know that we know God. The true beatitude is derived from God himself rather than our knowledge of God, and the awareness of this truth is fundamentally an *effect* of beatitude rather than being *constitutive* of it. Second, we do find certain passages where Eckhart, contrary to his usual preference for intellect,

<sup>530</sup> Eckhart, *Pr. 2* (DW I 42,6-43,1-3) (trans. Walshe in *Mystical Eckhart*, 2009, 81).

<sup>531</sup> Eckhart, *Pr. 2* (DW I 44,1-2) (trans. Walshe in *Mystical Eckhart*, 2009, 81).

<sup>532</sup> Eckhart, *Pr. 48* (DW II 420,3-10) (trans. Walshe in *Mystical Eckhart*, 2009, 310-11).

regards love as the means by which the union with God is fulfilled. *Sermon 60* (W45) is a good example of this. It is basically a homily on the cosmic eros, which shows affinities with Dionysius without actually quoting him. Based on the two points, McGinn comes to the conclusion that the Dominican's views on union are more complex than often thought. On the one hand, both knowing and loving unite in one way; but from another perspective, neither unites in the ultimate sense insofar as they are conceived of as powers of the soul.<sup>533</sup>

Sharing the same concern with McGinn, Reiner Schürmann tackles this problem from a different angle. Instead of talking about the union of the soul with God as McGinn does, Schürmann draws our attention to the interplay between God, man and the world. The symbolic identity of the three suggests a playful presence in which God, man and the world are joined together due to the play of this identity. This threefold identity as described by Schürmann is far more complicated than a metaphysical identity, whose focus remains on the transcendence and immanence. In addition it marks a dramatic difference from the kind of pantheistic identity which speaks of universal ontic homogeneity. Based on the structure of this threefold interplay Schürmann puts forward his innovative interpretation as to the detached or released mind<sup>534</sup> in Eckhart. According to Schürmann's reading of Eckhart, the released mind that is totally devoid of all *eigenschaft* becomes the 'there', the very locus, where the energetic identity of God, of man and of the world restores itself.<sup>535</sup> Thus the released mind is no longer the created human mind or soul, but becomes the uncreated ground, the 'un-intellectual' basis of intellect that sustains the endless interplay of God, man and the world. This insight undoubtedly helps us to understand the subtle linkage between intellect and detachment/releasement, the two typically Eckhartian themes that persist throughout his Latin and German corpus. Schürmann certainly gives serious thought to this question, and his thinking on the Eckhartian intellectualism is basically unfolded through a detailed expounding of the word *gemüete* in *Sermon 76* (W7). Schürmann claims:

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<sup>533</sup> Bernard McGinn, *The Harvest of Mysticism in Medieval Germany* (2005), 186-7.

<sup>534</sup> Unlike many Eckhartian scholars, Schürmann translates Eckhart's *Gelassenheit* as 'releasement', and *sêe* as 'mind' rather than 'soul'. From his perspective *sêe* in Eckhart mostly stands for Augustine's *mens* or *animus*, which signify the mind. Only in the cases where *sêe* is used in the sense of *anima*, alluding to the animating principle of the body, it is proper to translate it as 'soul'. See Reiner Schürmann, *Meister Eckhart: Mystic and Philosopher* (1978), Introduction, xiv.

<sup>535</sup> Reiner Schürmann, *Meister Eckhart: Mystic and Philosopher* (1978), 109.

The *gemüete* contains in itself the whole of the spiritual activities, from the ramifications buried in the sensible up to the peak that touches the One. Meister Eckhart distinguishes, as we know, the divaricate capillaries of *gemüete* turned towards the multiple from its unified and unalloyed summit or core. In this he adopts the ancient theory of the two faces of the mind.... The difficult question which separates Augustinians and Thomists in this matter [the division of the mind into exterior knowledge by abstraction and interior knowledge by intuition], the knowledge of the soul by itself and especially the role of the phantasms in it, does not seem to have retained the attention of Eckhart. The interior eye that sees God without images or any mediation knows a universal in the ground of the mind: the common perfection of humankind. A detached man possesses simultaneously, in a unique act of intellection, God, things, and himself.<sup>536</sup>

Through the above analysis we can see that Schürmann concentrates on the totality of the spectrum covered by the German word *gemüete*. As *gemüete* pertains to the spiritual activities as a whole, it follows that the act of intellection is essential to the aforementioned symbolic identity of God, things and man. Unsurprisingly, the union of the soul with God, or the birth of the Son in us, according to Schürmann's observation, is not essentially intended by Eckhart. To those who read Eckhart's *gemüete* in the Augustinian or Neoplatonic light, Schürmann brings forward the following question: If that is the case, why should Eckhart link the spark to the cognitive faculty of man? Put more frankly, why this intellectualism in Eckhart? The answer to this question, Schürmann suggests, should be sought in the intellect that is destined to become all things, which is obviously a doctrine that Eckhart has learned from Aristotle and his Arabic commentators, in particular Avicenna. Overall Schürmann's solution rehabilitates the central role of the intellect in Eckhart's theological framework; the link of the unlimited power of the intellect with Eckhart's anthropology is well explained, however it remains unclear how this line of anthropological concern fits into his theology.

The lack of clarity in Schürmann's exposition probably derives from his understanding of Eckhart's detachment/releasement. As can be seen in McGinn and

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<sup>536</sup> Reiner Schürmann, *Meister Eckhart: Mystic and Philosopher* (1978), 145.

Schürmann, the Eckhartian notion of detachment/releasement is taken mainly as the self-denial of the soul/mind, which speaks of the soul/mind's stripping of its createdness, or to borrow Simone Weil's concept, 'decreation'.<sup>537</sup> By taking Eckhart's detachment/releasement essentially as the sort of spiritual practice that only applies to the human soul/mind, we seem to have reduced 'detachment' to an imperative or norm that the divine imposes upon mankind. That cannot be what Eckhart intends to say; in fact, the word 'detachment' in the Eckhartian context primarily concerns the divine rather than human, as he overtly declares in *Sermon VI*: 'God's nature, existence, and life consist in sharing himself and giving himself totally.'<sup>538</sup> Seen in this light, 'detachment' in the full sense can only be applied to God; no creature is perfectly capable of self-giving.

Unlike McGinn and Schürmann, Markus Vinzent shifts the focus of attention from the human mind/soul to the divine, in the sense that human detachment is considered as a reflection of God's own detachment. At the very beginning of his *The Art of Detachment* Vinzent directly defines God as detachment;<sup>539</sup> in addition he places detachment in a position that is substantially prior to the aforementioned transcendental terms such as oneness, truth, being and good. In his own words: 'In contrast to detachment, all other transcendentals and perfections apply to the divine essence only secondarily.'<sup>540</sup> This is because these transcendentals are applied to divine essence according to the way in which its detachment is realised, for instance, oneness and being speak of divine essence in relation to what it generates as God, such as the Trinity and the creation, the multitude and beings. Hence a formal opposition is incurred between the transcendentals and the discrete things, for example oneness and multitude, being and beings. By contrast detachment is the very predication of the ground itself, a negative description, yet more than negative, precisely the negation of negation. Put briefly: 'Detachment condenses concisely Eckhart's notion of negating the negation, and therefore the resolutely positive self-description of the Divine.'<sup>541</sup>

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<sup>537</sup> Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots* (London, Henley and Boston, 1978).

<sup>538</sup> Eckhart, *Sermo VI,1* n.55 (LW IV 55,1-2) (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Teacher and Preacher*, 1986, 213).

<sup>539</sup> We read: 'Detachment is the very definition of God's essence. It expresses the Divine's radical kenosis to create this universe and be its very core. Only by being detached from itself is the Divine what-it-is, namely divine. The very nature of the Divine is creative origin and salvific incarnation. The results of what the Divine creates are not in the slightest less than their origin' See Markus Vinzent, *The Art of Detachment* (2011), 1.

<sup>540</sup> Markus Vinzent, *The Art of Detachment* (2011), 34.

<sup>541</sup> *Ibid.*

Vinzent's insightful exposition of divine detachment as shown above sheds new light on Eckhart's notion of the divine intellect, which impels us to rethink Eckhart's declaration in *Parisian Question 1* that God is intellect, and his being depends on his knowing, not the other way around. This leads to the question: How do the divine intellect and divine detachment relate to each other? In other words, how does God's knowing relate to his self-detaching? In what sense is knowledge associated with detachment? Vinzent comes up with an innovative solution: knowledge is a notion for encapsulating detachment. The reason is explained as follows. Knowledge indicates self-projection; it is radically a form of being only through reflecting and going out of oneself; thus being intellect itself is only through knowing as intellect. It follows that the ground as knowledge is source of its own existence, oneness, truth and goodness. In that sense we have to recognise that God is by his nature *ratio* (*ratio intellectus*) rather than being (*ratio entis*), hence the statement typical of Eckhart: not because God is, is he rational, but otherwise. To translate this in terms of detachment, we may say that because God is self-projecting, he is, his being depends on his self-projecting.<sup>542</sup> Therefore God, as rational intellect, is the universal cause of being – his own being and the being of everything; while as rational intellect he is, as already proposed by Plotinus, above being.<sup>543</sup> As the principle or ground of being, intellect denotes kenosis in the sense that the act of intellect consists in emptying itself and virtually receiving something other than itself. Knowing, therefore, inevitably involves self-eradication, and vice versa.

Thus in Eckhart we find two terms that are used to describe the ground: intellect as seen in *Parisian Question 1* and detachment in his Latin *Sermon VI*, although literally he puts it as 'sharing and giving himself totally'. A cross-reading of the two texts brings us to the point that both intellect and detachment are intended to formulate a predication of the ground of the divine in an apophatic manner: intellect as the purity of being which gives rise to all beings, and detachment as the nothingness which leads to unlimited, infinite potentialities and possibilities. In accordance with the notion of God as intellect or detachment, the spiritual practice in the context of Eckhart is no longer exempt from stretching the human intellect to the extreme, in the sense that we should always try our best to reinforce our self-detachment and to enlarge our open-mindedness by means of

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<sup>542</sup> Markus Vinzent, *The Art of Detachment* (2011), 35.

<sup>543</sup> Werner Beierwaltes, 'Deus est Esse – Esse est Deus', in *Platonismus und Idealismus* (Frankfurt, 2004), 2nd edition, 17f.

understanding others. In that sense the kind of sentimental approach to God that is driven purely by the power of personal will falls short, because the will or the intention to be one with God should be detached according to Eckhart's art of detachment. As a matter of fact, our attachment to God, a sort of spiritual attachment, represents a deceiving hindrance to our spiritual progress, to the extent that we often end up with our desire for God, or with a God that is wrapped by our intention and will instead of God himself, the naked, bare God as he is in himself. The act of intellect offers one way to overcome the dominance of personal will: by knowing others and understanding things as they are, sometimes we are forced to step out of the old habits and are pushed out of the comfort zone created by self-will. The ceaseless effort in performing intellectual exercise serves to remove the deep-rooted self-attachment, in particular the personal will, the inner disposition or inclination to *this* or *that*. The logic is that if we cling to anything at all, we will definitely miss the chance of becoming God which is neither *this* nor *that*, but *all*. Again, the conduct of self-detachment or our effort in stretching the intellect cannot be performed without the help of grace of the divine: as aforementioned, our detachment is fundamentally a reflection of the divine detachment. God detaches himself so that we are able to detach ourselves, and God became man so that man can become God.

Despite his lack of interest in discussing the so-called mystical experience, such as rapture, ecstasy or transport of mind, Eckhart does give us his viewpoint on this issue. Following Thomas's exposition in *De Veritate*, q.13, a.1-2,<sup>544</sup> in *Sermo XXII*, when expounding what is meant by 'I know a man in Christ' (2 *Corinthians* 12:2), Eckhart sums up the ecstatic experience into four types. The first type of ecstasy is achieved through intensive love driven by intentions, which refers to the Dionysian ecstasy of love.<sup>545</sup> The second is achieved through the vision of the imagination or spirit due to the intervention of some supernatural power, as happened to John the Evangelist in *Revelation* 1 and to Peter in *Acts* 11. The third occurs when the mind is abstracted from the senses and imagination and is carried off to the intellectual, when one is allowed to

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<sup>544</sup> Thomas expounds this topic at length in Q13. He starts with the question 'What is rapture?' in article 1, which is followed by article 2, 'Did Paul see God through his essence when he was enraptured?' In this sermon Eckhart draws heavily on Thomas, but he disagrees with Thomas on the view that man is unable to rise to the knowledge of God in this life, which, according to Thomas, can only be achieved in heaven.

<sup>545</sup> Following Dionysius, Eckhart recognises the immense power of love, which is able to push the lover into the beloved, see Eckhart, *Sermo XXII* n.216 (LW IV 203,4-5).

see God through the intelligible, particularly alluding to the kind of sleep or ecstasy Adam experienced in *Genesis* 2. The fourth happens when the mind itself sees God in himself in his essence, which refers to what Paul experienced when being caught up to the third heaven.<sup>546</sup> In line with Thomas, Eckhart takes the variety of approaches to God into consideration, and like Thomas he makes a distinction between one and another. Nevertheless, he does not follow Thomas to stress the limited capacity of the human intelligence in this life.<sup>547</sup> Instead Eckhart draws our attention to the feasibility of achieving an intellectual ecstasy or the ecstasy of mind in this life, here and now, which is a foretaste of the divine sweetness as Augustine describes in the Seventh Book of his *Confession*. In his homily on Augustine, *Vas auri solidum ornatum omni lapide pretioso* (*Eccl.* 50:10), Eckhart mentions the three ways in which the divine knowledge or an experience of God can be obtained: 1) the foreknowledge of hidden or future things by prophecy; 2) a free habit that leads towards action and fruition; and 3) the foretasting of divine bliss, the ecstasy of the mind which takes place in the fruit. This foretaste of the divine bliss is derived from the intensive and excessive activity of the intellect, such as immersing oneself in the cognition of science and wisdom or, as Eckhart calls it, pursuing a wise science.<sup>548</sup>

Probably due to his twofold role as a scholastic theologian and a Dominican friar, Eckhart associates intellectual activities with an uplifting experience of God. What he means by the ecstasy of mind, at least in the above context, suggests a subtle divergence from both Augustinian and Thomistic stances, as it is not based on the will and love as seen in Augustine, nor does it discount the possibility of the human intelligence reaching the knowledge of God in this life as seen in Thomas.

Given the inquisitorial pursuit of the heresy of the Free Spirit<sup>549</sup> in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, and Eckhart's affinity with the Rhineland mystics, in particular the parallels found between his teaching and that of the prominent female mystics such as Mechthild of Magdeburg and Marguerite Porete,<sup>550</sup> it is hard to believe that Eckhart is incautious

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<sup>546</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>547</sup> See Thomas, *De Veritate*, q.13, a.1.

<sup>548</sup> See Eckhart, *Sermo die b. Augustini Parisius habitus* (28.8.1303), n.6 (LW V 94,14-95,2) (trans. Markus Vinzent in *The Art of Detachment*, 2011, 76).

<sup>549</sup> See Bernard McGinn's account of mysticism and heresy, in *The Harvest of Mysticism in Medieval Germany* (2005), 48-79.

<sup>550</sup> Among the recent studies of Eckhart and mysticism, Amy Hollywood's approach deserves more attention. Her work offers a sound comparison of Meister Eckhart with both Mechthild of Magdeburg and Marguerite Porete, on the basis of a detailed textual analysis of Eckhart's sermons, Mechthild's *The*



with his wording when it comes to the grey area concerning an individual's personal experience of God. As shown above, by resorting to scripture and the authority of Thomas and Augustine, Eckhart seems to suggest an all-embracing path to God. A closer scrutiny of the two sermons indicates that he not only makes room for love and imagination, but also allows cognitive activities to be included. Spiritual practice as thus presented does not exclude the work of daily routine, hence it does not make much sense to draw a thick line between clergy and layman, between the cloister and the mundane world, a conclusion that is strikingly reminiscent of the meister's final words: 'We should accept God equally in all ways and in all things....If you take one way, such and such, that is not God. If you take *this* or *that*, you are not taking God, for God is in all ways and equal in all ways, for anyone who can take him so.'<sup>551</sup>

Thus Eckhart makes it clear that the best way to glorify God in human life is to take him equally in all things and in all ways. The problem is how to achieve this sense of equality? How can we be totally free from discrimination and overcome completely our inborn preference, our inclination and disposition to *this* or *that*? One may wonder whether Eckhart has overlooked the weakness and limitedness of human beings and overestimated the capacity of human nature. It may appear so at first glance, but if we posit his final words into his theological framework, and connect them with the pervasive themes in his thought such as detachment and intellect, we will see that the meister actually gives us some clue as to how this can be done. Based on his own life experience as a scholar and a friar, in his Latin sermon Eckhart lays stress on the ecstasy of mind, and particularly makes the point that it takes place *in* the fruit. It is worth noting that in stressing the practical work of the intellect, Eckhart is not promoting an Aristotelian intellectualism that invites us to investigate the world for the sake of curiosity. What he intends to highlight is that the ecstatic, elevating experience derived from intellective operation is the fruitful effect of the detached soul in which God dwells, and it is indeed a taste of God's sweetness; one may call it a foretaste of the bliss in heaven. Like detachment, intellect is apophatic by nature, and paradoxically

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*Flowing Light of the Godhead*, and Porete's *The Mirror of Simple Souls*. See Amy Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart* (Notre Dame and London, 1995).

On the forgotten spiritual heroes in the Rhine Valley, see Rufus M. Jones, *The Flowering of Mysticism: The Friends of God in the Fourteenth Century* (New York, 1940).

<sup>551</sup> This piece is not included in DW; it was first seen in Pfeiffer's edition (685-6) and was then treated as 'sermon 111' in Quint's edition. It has been translated into English by Walshe in *Mystical Eckhart* (2009), 588-9.

this apophatic nature makes a total reception of God possible, which in turn, leads to unlimited creativity. As the metaphor of virgin/wife shows, the virginity of the receptive intellect leads to the productivity of an active intellect. According to Eckhart, only when the soul is able to fulfil the twofold task of being a virgin and wife, will it reach maturity. Precisely on this point, Eckhart claims that God's *ratio* is my *ratio*, no more, no less.

### **Chapter 3 A Comparison between Zhu Xi and Meister Eckhart**

As the two chapters above have delineated, the profiles of both Zhu Xi and Meister Eckhart are intricately embedded in their own historical and cultural contexts. Sitting in the longstanding tradition of scriptural learning, one in Confucianism and the other in Christianity, both Zhu Xi and Meister Eckhart demonstrate remarkable originality in their works. The element of creative thinking is highly recognisable, even in the medieval sense of scholarship, which in both traditions is indisputably based upon the authority of scriptures as well as the influential exegeses of the past commentators. With mastery of scriptural learning as well as expertise in discursive language and philosophical debate, both Zhu Xi and Meister Eckhart manage to fit their innovative perspectives into their own exegetical traditions. In that sense the hermeneutical framework into which each thinker conscientiously chooses to shape his idea is no less important than the creative idea itself. Each enriches his own intellectual tradition, due to the new light he sheds upon the sacred texts before him: the *Four Books* in the case of Zhu Xi and the two Testaments in that of Eckhart.

Clearly, what shines through in their work is a sophisticated integration of intellectual rigour, religious faith and spiritual aspiration, rather than a piecemeal performance of the three. In the context of Zhu Xi and in that of Meister Eckhart, academic research is conducted mainly through scriptural learning, which could be developed into a life-long dialogue with the scriptural texts. Unsurprisingly, it is through intensive study of scriptures that their thought takes shape and reaches maturity. Nevertheless, the intellectual brilliance of the two thinkers is not entirely confined to the conventional framework, but at some points breaks through and goes beyond that framework.

Thus, when exploring the world of a sophisticated and original thinker like Zhu Xi or Eckhart, we are confronted with a paradox. On the one hand, the uniqueness of their thinking disqualifies any type of reading that is not performed strictly on their own terms. In that sense even an attempt to mirror them through their contemporary counterparts in the same tradition will run the risk of missing the crucial point of their thought and resulting in a diluted or distorted version of it, let alone any venture to embark upon a comparative study of the two. Seen in that light, such endeavours become unnecessary and insignificant, if not utterly nonsensical. Yet on the other hand, the very non-comparability of the two thinkers paradoxically calls for a broader horizon, which will allow the brilliance of their unconventional thoughts to be better recognised and appreciated, given the historical facts that the intellectual rigour of Zhu Xi and of Meister Eckhart suffered similar fates in their own traditions. In the case of Zhu Xi, despite his dominance of Chinese academia for nearly six centuries, his intellectual attempt at a systematic reconstruction of Confucianism was long downplayed by many of the Qing literati due to a change in research interest;<sup>552</sup> and in the last century, thanks to many New-Confucian scholars, in particular Mou Zongsan and his adherents, Zhu Xi's theoretical reconstruction was classified as a side-branch of Confucianism, in contrast to the so-called authentic mainstream represented by his counterpart, the school of mind.<sup>553</sup> In Eckhart's case, the power of his original thinking formed a decisive factor contributing to the posthumous condemnation of some of his views in 1329, and ever since then the label of heretic has cast its enduring shadow over the reception of Eckhart's thought within the Christian tradition. Such similar scenarios occurring in the two different traditions invite the reader to rethink the potential of comparative study, in the hope of finding parallels that may throw new light on the distinctive features of the two intellectual profiles.

Given the complexity of each thinker, as set out in detail in Chapters 1 and 2, in this comparative chapter we will highlight two points in particular: their intellectual rigour in conceptualising 'intellect'; and the problematique of 'hermeneutics', which concerns the way in which this intellect understands itself and its world. From a comparative perspective, we will place Zhu Xi and Meister Eckhart together so as to form a cross-

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<sup>552</sup> This paradigm shift can be summarised in one phrase, 'from philosophy to philology'. See Benjamin A. Elman, *From Philosophy to Philology: Social and Intellectual Aspects of Change in late Imperial China* (Cambridge MA, 1984).

<sup>553</sup> Mou Zongsan, *Xinti yu Xingti* 心體與性體 *Constitutive Mind and Constitutive Nature* (Hong Kong, 1968), 1, 49.

reading of them. On that basis some parallels will be drawn between the works of the two thinkers, and hence the similarities and differences between them. Before moving on to the details, it is worth noting that the real picture is so complex that it is almost impossible to keep the differences and the similarities apart, because the apparent similarities between the two thinkers are often underpinned by a fundamental divergence, and an essential agreement is sometimes seen underneath a seemingly radical contrast. For that reason, the comparison will not be divided squarely into similarities and differences; instead it aims to reveal how the elements of similarities and differences are subtly blended under the common themes that are particularly addressed by both thinkers.

### 3.1 The Concept of the Human Intellect in Zhu Xi and Meister Eckhart

With a focus on the subject of intellect, a number of parallels can be seen between Zhu Xi and Meister Eckhart, which can be summarised as follows.

- The Threefold Meaning of Intellect

As the details unfolded in Chapters 1 and 2 suggest, in both Zhu Xi and Meister Eckhart, knowing is not really taken in an epistemological sense, although the question of epistemology is not completely ruled out. What is meant by knowing is mainly expounded in metaphysical and spiritual terms. As focused textual or documentary proof we can point to Zhu Xi's *Bu Zhuan* 補傳 *Supplement* and Eckhart's *Parisian Question* 1, in each of which the priority of knowing is solemnly declared, in a way that is appropriate to each thinker's own scholarly tradition.

Zhu Xi starts by performing editorial work on *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning*. After rearranging the old text, he inserts his *Supplement* into the newly structured scriptural text, so as to form a complete piece of work in terms of structure and content. By means of writing a *Bu Zhuan* 補傳 *Supplement* to *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning*, Zhu Xi manages to integrate master Cheng's philosophy into that scriptural text. Accordingly, Zhu Xi's interpretation of *gewu zhizhi* 格物致知 the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge is turned into an integral part of *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning*; thus the old Confucian doctrine of *gewu zhizhi* 格物致知 gains new life and acquires new meaning through Zhu Xi's philosophical interpretation. Hence, to investigate things means to probe *li* 理 the Principle, and to probe the principles of things

simultaneously activates the intellectual power of *xin* 心 the mind or mind-heart. Clearly, in Zhu Xi's context, *gewu zhizhi* 格物致知 the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge do not have an end in knowledge of particular things, but intend to penetrate into the ultimate truth in which *li* 理 the Principle and *xin* 心 the mind or mind-heart are unified as one. By addressing the essential importance of the investigation of things, Zhu Xi allows the element of knowing to pervade the whole process of Confucian self-cultivation; thus in Zhu Xi's system, the meaning of Confucian sageliness and the approach to such an ideal state are thoroughly redefined.

In Eckhart's *Parisian Question 1* we find a similar revolutionary declaration, which aims to redefine the concept of God. Unlike Zhu Xi, who has to go through the editorial preparations before composing his *Supplement*, Eckhart presents his metaphysical thought directly in the form of *quaestio*, the genre typical of scholasticism. Based on a systematic study of Thomas, Eckhart brings forth a thesis which forms a contrast to the Thomistic stance, namely that knowing is prior to being in the divine. He thus defines God as intellect, and takes the divine intellect as the source of being, which is purity of being yet gives rise to all beings. This line of thought is expounded at length in Eckhart's scholastic commentaries and continues to resonate in his sermons.

Thus is seen in Zhu Xi and Eckhart a remarkable parallel with regard to knowing. Both prioritise knowing and take knowing as an activity that concerns things in the world, the knower and the ultimate truth, be it *li* 理 the Principle or God, and simultaneously brings light to all three. In addition, both speak of an intellectual unification of the three, be that in terms of *li* 理 the Principle and *xin* 心 the mind or mind-heart as seen in Zhu Xi, or in terms of the divine and human, the creator and creature as seen in Eckhart. In both Zhu Xi and Eckhart, knowing the world, knowing oneself and knowing the ultimate truth are not to be kept apart, but are fused into one in the sense that the three are to be simultaneously carried out in one action.<sup>554</sup> It follows

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<sup>554</sup> Both Zhu Xi and Eckhart show an inclination to bridge the gulf between this world and the world beyond, and in so doing neither intends to play down the role of metaphysical thinking, but pushes it one step further in their own tradition. But in both Zhu Xi and Eckhart the philosophical speculation is fundamentally embedded in a framework that is religious and spiritual in nature. The spiritual aspiration on personal ground together with the religious concern expressed in social and political terms forms a basis peculiar to the medieval scholastic thinkers in the West and East, which can hardly be shared by an existentialist living in a post-Kantian age. Therefore I hesitate to refer this line of thought in Zhu Xi and Eckhart to the existentially defined Dasein as presented in Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*. Although parallels can be seen between Heidegger's delineation of the inner-worldly structure of Dasein and the kind of this-worldliness in Zhu Xi and Eckhart, there are still serious impediments to form a comparison

that the dividing lines that are normally drawn between cognition, self-reflection and contemplation of the transcendent divine no longer make sense, so far as knowing is considered as the very act that pertains to *li* 理 the Principle or God the divine truth, even in its dealing with the particular things in the world.<sup>555</sup> Despite the different terminologies as presented in Zhu Xi and Meister Eckhart, in both contexts knowing is meant to denote the crux through which human, things and *li* 理 the Principle or God are unified.

Given this similarity between Zhu Xi and Eckhart with regard to the definition of knowing, it becomes clear that in both contexts, the human intellect as the faculty of knowing in us is treated as the ground on which such a unification takes place. In that sense, the concept of the human intellect more or less serves to define human nature. As the details concerning this question vary immensely between the two different contexts, we will discuss them in separate paragraphs below.

What is distinctive of Zhu Xi's thinking in this regard is that the human intellect is not treated merely as a miraculous function of *qi* 氣 the cosmic matter, but is more importantly to be considered in the light of *li* 理 the Principle. Given the axiom of the Cheng-Zhu school, '*xing ji li* 性即理 Principle is nature',<sup>556</sup> it is not hard to see that in Zhu Xi's system the element of knowing has been integrated into the Neo-Confucian notion of human nature;<sup>557</sup> consequently the human intellect is to be conceptualised as an innate faculty rooted in human nature. In his works there are at least three terms referring to the concept of the human intellect, namely '*zhi* 知', '*jue* 覺' or '*zhijue* 知覺'. They are treated as almost interchangeable, although literally '*zhi* 知' means knowing or understanding, '*jue* 覺' sensing, and '*zhijue* 知覺' being aware or conscious of something. In Zhu Xi the three terms speak of the intellective faculty of mind which

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or connection with Heidegger's existentialism. See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by Joan Stambaugh (Albany, 2010).

<sup>555</sup> As summarised by Rudolf Otto, Eckhart's mysticism has an intellectual rather than emotional character. See Rudolf Otto, *Mysticism East and West*, trans. by Bertha L. Bracey and Richenda C. Payne (New York, 1970), 48.

<sup>556</sup> Zhu Xi's interpretation of nature or the original nature of human being proceeds in the same vein as Cheng Yi, who first came up with the phrase- *xing ji li* 性即理 nature is principle. See ZZYL, *Juan* 4, ZZQS, Vol.14, 182-214.

<sup>557</sup> This point has been indirectly touched on by Chong-ying Cheng, and is given relatively clearer explanation by A. C. Graham. Graham maintains that the decisive novelty in the new conceptual scheme of the Cheng-Zhu school is the equation of knowledge with permeation of the *qi*-氣 by *li*-理. See Chong-ying Cheng, 'Chu Hsi's Methodology and Theory of Understanding'; A. C. Graham, 'What Was New in the Cheng-Chu Theory of Human Nature?' Both in Wing-tsit Chan (ed.), *Chu Hsi and Neo-Confucianism* (1986), respectively 169-96, 138-57.

constitutes the innate capacity for the principles of things. Thus the overarching function of ‘*zhi* 知’ has a much broader horizon than man’s innate sense of right and wrong as seen in the context of Mencius; in other words, it goes beyond the traditional understanding of man’s moral instinct rooted in human nature. Moreover, Zhu Xi’s notion of ‘*zhi* 知’ as presented in his *Supplement* blurs the division between *dexing zhizhi* 德性之知 innate knowledge and *wenjian zhizhi* 聞見之知 knowledge acquired through senses.<sup>558</sup> Taking his *Supplement* as an example, when in his *gewu zhizhi* 格物致知 interpretation of the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge he particularly stresses the link between the intellectual function of human mind and the principles of things, he is evidently seeing *zhi* 知 in the light of *li* 理 the Principle rather than *qi*-氣 the cosmic matter. To Zhu Xi the principles that inhere in things and the human intellect that is meant to probe the principles of things are ontologically as one being. Overall, as seen in his *Bu Zhuan* 補傳 *Supplement*, *Yu Lei* 語類 *Conversations* and other texts, Zhu Xi persistently stresses the link between *zhi* 知 and *li* 理; his exposition of the concept of *zhi* 知 the human intellect is mainly unfolded on a *xing er shang* 形而上 metaphysical ground, which is his theory of *li* 理 the Principle. In the context of Neo-Confucianism as represented by the Cheng-Zhu school in particular, *li* 理 the Principle is the very concept that serves to define the original nature or *tiandi zhi xing* 天地之性 the heavenly nature of mankind. So far as the axiom ‘*xing ji Li* 性即理 Principle is nature’ is concerned, to acquire the knowledge of *li* 理 the Principle constitutes the essential part of Confucian learning, the aim of which, according to Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi, is to become a sage. As the knowledge of *li* 理 the Principle can only be obtained through the act of *zhi* 知 the human intellect in its *gewu* 格物 investigation of things, it follows that a sagely character’s spiritual achievement in terms of self-realisation cannot do without his effort in the investigation of things. Thus it becomes clear that mainly due to his exposition of *li* 理 the Principle, the question of *zhi* 知 the human intellect comes to the fore. It is through the act of knowing that the unification of *xin* 心 mind or mind-heart and *li* 理 the Principle is possible. His emphasis on knowing and on man’s capacity for knowledge elevates the concept of *zhi* 知 the human intellect from the function of *xin* 心 human mind in terms of a miraculous function of *qi* 氣 the cosmic matter, to *xing er shang* 形而上 the metaphysical level. Thus the concept of *zhi* 知 the

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<sup>558</sup> In conversing with his students Zhu Xi strongly refutes Zhang Zai’s view concerning the radical difference between *dexing zhizhi* 德性之知 innate knowledge and *wenjian zhizhi* 聞見之知 knowledge acquired through senses. See ZZYL, Juan 99, ZZQS, 17, 3334.

human intellect is bridged primarily to *li* 理 the Principle, and extensively to another principal Confucian concept, that of *xing* 性 nature. In that sense Zhu Xi's effort in conceptualising *zhi* 知 the human intellect suggests a new understanding of human nature, one that has modified or even redefined the classical Confucian theory of human nature which is based primarily on the concept of *ren* 仁 humaneness. Accordingly, the element of knowing is incorporated into the program of personal cultivation, and becomes essential to one's moral and spiritual growth in terms of self-realisation.

A similar phenomenon is seen in the context of Eckhart. The theological declaration made by Eckhart in *Parisian Question 1* obviously shifts the focus from being to knowing, which sets the tone for his theological thinking as a whole. The argument presented in *Parisian Question 1* is predicated on the radical difference between intellectual being and formal being, or being in the intellect and being in reality, and the former holds priority over the latter in terms of cause and effect. In addition Eckhart addresses the principle of formal opposition, meaning that formal existence can not be held in both cause and effect. Therefore, if we take God as cause and the world as effect, it follows that if the world is called being, God cannot be being, but the purity of being which is intellect; similarly, if God is called being or existence as seen in Eckhart's *Commentary on Exodus*, then the world cannot be being or existence, but non-existence or nothing. Based on the principle of formal opposition, Eckhart predicates God as the divine intellect in some places, such as in *Parisian Question 1*, but in other places he predicates God as being, as in his *Commentary on Exodus*; the two different predications do not really contradict each other, because both reveal the same relation between God and the world.

Due to a nuanced articulation of the concept of relation, as seen in the third newly rediscovered *Parisian Question*, Eckhart posits the two opposites, God and the world, into one relation, one as ground and the other as end. Thus God and the world are no longer related in terms of proportion and hierarchy as in Thomas, but are mutually defined and are inter-dependent so long as the two opposites form one relation. In line with his definition of the divine intellect and his insightful exposition of relation unfolded in the *Parisian Questions*, Eckhart employs Neoplatonic teaching in commenting on scriptures, especially on John's gospel. For instance, Eckhart maintains the stance that the idea of a thing, which exists eternally in the divine intellect, holds ontological priority over the created thing in the world. But Eckhart speaks of the



Platonic theory of idea in paradoxical terms; he maintains that God, as the idea of the world, is totally in and totally out of the world, hence God is most similar and most dissimilar to the world.<sup>559</sup> As shown in his scriptural commentaries, the paradoxical relation of God to the world depicted by Eckhart is built on a Platonic ground, although the whole discussion is not unfolded in a solely Platonic framework. The themes running through his scholastic commentaries and *quaestiones* maintain an essential role in his Latin sermons; they gain a vernacular expression when preached in Middle High German, and give rise to his doctrines such as those concerning detachment, and the birth of the Son in the soul. The line of thought in his homilies concerning the divine detachment brings us back to *Parisian Question 1*, where God is defined as intellect. Eckhart's expositions of intellect and detachment both proceed from the divine to human, and both indicate an emphasis on the apophatic way of predication. As shown in *Parisian Questions 1, 2 and 3*, intellect is apophatic by nature. With regard to intellect, be it the divine or the human intellect, it is open to all forms and all being, because intellect does not possess a form of its own. In other words, because intellect is by nature free from being and form, it holds the potential to receive all forms and to be all things. Thus the apophatic, detached, and receptive nature of intellect allows it to have knowledge of things and knowledge of God at the same time, as God and the world are mutually defined in one relation. Hence, intellect speaks of the divine origin of human nature and suggests the link between human and divine; it even breaks through into the ground that is beyond distinction.

Therefore, in both contexts intellect serves to define the heavenly or divine element that is treated as an innate faculty rooted in human nature; hence the act of intellect constitutes the essential part of spiritual growth in each individual life, and determines the means to achieve the unification of *xin* 心 mind and *li* 理 Principle in Zhu Xi, or of man and God in Eckhart. To both thinkers intellect holds the key to the sacred teaching that underlies the words of scriptures, be it the universal truth that rules nature and the human world in Zhu Xi, or the divine law that consists in the natural order and beyond in Eckhart. Indeed, both are promoting a kind of spirituality that allows an essential role for man's intellect; moreover it is to be spelt out in a highly scholastic manner, which means that the practical importance does not contradict metaphysical consideration of the thing. The whole potential power inherent in human body, mind and spirit is

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<sup>559</sup> Eckhart, *In Ex.* n.112 (LW II 110,3-6) (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Teacher and Preacher*, 1986, 81).

believed to be released through the act of intellect, and only through the operation of intellect will the power inherent in man be released to the utmost. In the case of Zhu Xi, man's intellect corresponds to *li* 理 the Principle, and intellectual grasp of *li* 理 the Principle constitutes the approach to sagehood. In the case of Eckhart, intellect forms the direct link between man and God.

- The Priority of Intellect over Will

In addition, both Zhu Xi and Eckhart maintain the stance that intellect has priority over will. As a result, the issue of man's will power is marginalised in both contexts, although to a different extent and for different reasons. As shown in Chapter 1 (1.2.3.1 and 1.2.3.2), Zhu Xi endeavours to prove that knowledge holds the power to determine action; knowing is prior to willing and also determines the act of will. In Eckhart the Dominican stance concerning the priority of intellect over will has been pushed one step further and indeed seems to be radicalised. Zhu Xi takes the act of probing principle of things as the initial step of Confucian learning. Naturally therefore, knowing becomes essential to moral practice: as he expounds in *Q&A Concerning Da Xue Huo Wen* 大學或問 *The Great Learning*, without understanding the reasons for moral norms, it is impossible to apply them properly to the ever-changing situations in real life, and blind adherence to moral norms often ends in catastrophic consequences. In Zhu Xi, the issue of morality is transformed into the issue of questing for moral principles; the focus of attention is no longer on the external moral action. Similarly, in his *Parisian Question 3*, Eckhart makes it clear that even when it concerns God, knowledge holds priority over love, and intellect has superiority over will (2.1.2.3). In his sermons, Eckhart regards intellect as the temple of God and insists that even the intention of being one with God ought to be detached (2.3). Put simply, the thinking of intellect seems to have catapulted both Zhu Xi and Eckhart out of the conventional perspectives of their own traditions. In Zhu Xi, his emphasis on the priority and superiority of knowing over will has thoroughly redefined Confucian morality and the way of self-realisation, and in that sense he has reconstructed Confucianism. In Eckhart, his radically uncompromising tone with regard to the superiority of intellect over will compels one to go beyond a God as defined by a theistic framework or a religious tradition. In both Zhu Xi and Eckhart the originality of their thinking gains a focused and systematic expression in their expounding of man's intellectual faculty, which

allows both to break through some conventional perspectives in their own traditions, but in different ways.

In Zhu Xi's system, the role of intellect is largely spelt out in terms of function rather than the definition of human species. In other words, his stress on man's intellective capacity must be compatible with the Confucian definition of man, which shows a focus on the moral consciousness rather than the intellective faculty. Zhu Xi finds no difficulty in affiliating himself with such an ethically oriented tradition; what he attempts is to reconstruct the whole system so that Confucianism as a whole will outstrip both Daoism and Buddhism in all aspects, namely personal spiritual awareness, social accountability and transcendent significance. That is the circumstance under which the concept of *li* 理 the Principle is proposed. By *li* 理 the Principle Zhu Xi means the origin of the universe and the eternal truth that outlives the corporeal. He certainly attaches transcendent significance to the concept of *li* 理 the Principle in the sense that he gives *li* 理 the Principle a logical priority over the concrete and the particular, but he does not locate it in the realm of an abstract reality that exists separately from the concrete and the particular things. His exposition of *li* 理 the Principle gives rise to the question of the human intellect. Nonetheless, in the context of Zhu Xi, the internal intellective faculty that is proper to the principle of external things does not directly indicate the highest existence of human being. Rather, the importance of man's intellective faculty lies in the fact that it formally initiates the process of Confucian personal cultivation, and in that sense it has enriched Confucian ethics by providing the traditional moral norms with epistemological back up, as well as a metaphysical ground. So long as it remains within the boundary of Confucianism, the power of man's intellect is tied up with Confucian moral concerns and theoretically serves as the means rather than the end. But in terms of praxis, the means can bear more performative significance than the ultimate goal, which enables Zhu Xi to bring the role of intellect to the core of the Confucian moral and spiritual practice. In short, Zhu Xi's version of Confucianism does not lack the element of man's intellectual approach to the eternal or transcendent truth, but this kind of philosophical speculation must be combined with the conventional Confucian concern for contextual appropriateness and social accountability. He never allows himself free rein in interpreting scriptures; his mode of thinking and expressing is characterised by a reconciliation of the intellectual approach with the Confucian moral and social concerns.

By contrast, Eckhart's treatment of the human intellect within the Christian tradition is a rather straightforward logical inference. In Christian tradition man is indisputably deemed a rational being and intellect stands for the image of God in man. What Eckhart stresses is not only the intellectual nature of human being, but also the same intellectual nature of God. Reasoning from God's point of view, Eckhart makes it very clear that God's nature is intellect and that for God understanding is existence.<sup>560</sup> Based on this premise, Eckhart gives his interpretation concerning the topic of creation and that of God's relation to his creature, in particular mankind. With regard to creation, Eckhart holds that God creates things through intellect. Just as there is no contradiction between the simplicity of his existence and his understanding many things, there is no contradiction in the case of God's creating the whole universe at once.<sup>561</sup> God simply holds the whole universe in his understanding. As for God's relation to man, Eckhart maintains that God speaks to man in his innermost being, which is intellect, and man is to receive the word of God on the ground of his intellect. He furthers this view by shifting the focus of attention to the characteristic of man's communication with the divine, which is thorough and mutual. God speaks all things to all things, meaning that God unfolds himself entirely and indiscriminately to all beings; and man's intellect should become pure receptive power so as to receive the whole, not part, of the divine word. In order to become a pure recipient, man needs to remove any attachment to the exterior work or meritorious deeds, and most of all, to his own selfhood and even his conception of God and his desire for God. In that case, God himself comes to man and is fully present in man; and man, by having nothing of his own, becomes nothing but God. The traditional perspective as to the dichotomy between God and human, between the creator and creature, has been overcome in Eckhart.

- Extension/Penetration in Contrast to Illumination

Another fundamental divergence between the systems of Zhu Xi and Eckhart concerns the specific way in which man's intellective power is to be directed in the act of knowing. In each case the exercise of intellect is to be carried out in different directions, which can be summed up as the difference between extension/penetration and illumination. Zhu Xi shows little interest in being illuminated or elevated by the power

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<sup>560</sup> Eckhart, *In Gen.* n.11 (LW I 1, 194,9-195,3) (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 86).

<sup>561</sup> Eckhart, *In Gen.* n.7 (LW I 1, 190,11-191,6) (trans. Bernard McGinn in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 84).

from on high; he insists that man's comprehension of *li* 理 the Principle is not a gift, but the natural result of a long-term accumulation of knowledge concerning the exterior and the interior. In Eckhart's expounding of the nature of man's intellect, illumination plays an essential role. From his perspective, the exercise of man's intellect is to be unfolded in the mutual communication between the superior and the inferior, and understanding indicates one's being illuminated by the light from the superior, thus being elevated to the next higher level in which one's proper existence is to be resumed. In the order of creation the human intellect is located within a twofold relationship, namely its relation to God and to the corporeal things. Eckhart believes human understanding of the world is obtained from adherence to God, which means knowing the world through God, not vice versa.

In Zhu Xi, the correlation between intellect, things and *li* 理 the Principle is touched upon, but not fully illustrated. Although he makes the point that the proper function of man's intellect is to grasp the principles of things, there is no clear distinction between the principle that is logically prior to things and the principle that is abstracted by intellect, which is posterior to things. Likewise he does not distinguish the way to understand the principle of the concrete and the means to apprehend *li* 理 the Principle in the abstract sense; to him understanding in either sense should start with the investigation of particular things. The practice of the investigation of things is performed in the sense of extending what one has known to what one is yet to know; when the knowledge of the particular things is accumulated to a certain degree, the understanding of the knower will naturally become comprehensive, so that it will be able to penetrate the concrete and have a glimpse of the abstract, and the transcendent character of *li* 理 Principle will then be personally appropriated. According to Zhu Xi, man's understanding or knowing is a process of proceeding from the particular to the general. Man's self-realisation parallels his comprehension of *li* 理 the Principle and proceeds along the same line. Therefore an individual's personal progress in the moral and spiritual senses must be rooted in a social context, which means that one should proceed from personal cultivation to inter-personal communication. In short, the knowledge of the principle of things as well as of the transcendent *li* 理 Principle is to be acquired through extension and penetration; the notion of being illuminated by the superior is not found in Zhu Xi's system.

- Accumulation in Contrast to Purification

Related to the contrast between extension and illumination as shown above, another fundamental difference between Zhu Xi and Eckhart with regard to the notion of intellect is the contrast between accumulation and purification. Zhu Xi's doctrine of the investigation of things and *gewu zhizhi* 格物致知 the extension of knowledge indicates a long progress of accumulation, whereas in Eckhart, knowing is to a great extent indicative of purifying, of removing the excessive so as to disclose the truth. The apophatic nature of Eckhart's notion of intellect is a controversial issue in Zhu Xi. Following his method of accumulation, Zhu Xi takes the end of knowing as an extremely positive expression, such as '*zhizhi* 知至 ultimate knowledge' or '*guantong* 貫通 thorough comprehension'; as seen in Chapter 1 (1.2.3.3), he deliberately avoids the apophatic expression found in Zhou Dun-yi, so as to keep a distance from the doctrine of *jing* 靜 quietism and *wu* 無 nothingness that is distinctive of Daoism. Accordingly Zhu Xi is not greatly concerned with the limitedness of human knowledge; his emphasis is rather on the unlimited openness and potential of knowing. The cataphatic predication such as '*zhizhi* 知至 ultimate knowledge' or '*guantong* 貫通 thorough comprehension' suggests the ideal state as the result of a long-term accumulation. Following the method of *gewu zhizhi* 格物致知 the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge, Zhu Xi stresses the active nature of the intellectual exercise, and insists that one should start from probing the principles of the particular things, and end in a comprehensive knowledge that overarches the internal and the external. Although he does mention the importance of *xuji* 虛己 emptying oneself in reading scriptures, the act of the intellect is largely portrayed in an active manner, and the element of passivity is basically expressed as a faithful attitude towards scriptures. By contrast, in Eckhart knowing is radically a reception, intellect is regarded as a pure receptive power (see 2.2.2.3). The power of the human intellect consists in its capacity to receive, in particular the grace of the divine, which ensures the mutual glance between the human intellect and the divine. In his sermons Eckhart repeatedly addresses the point that it is not of will that God loves us, but of necessity, for it is God's nature to love and to give himself completely. Therefore the human stands in a position to receive; what really matters to us is how to receive the gift of the divine. Only by becoming a perfect receiver will one be able to give what has been received back to God (2.3.2). The theological concerns in Eckhart's expounding of the human intellect

are alien to Zhu Xi's notion of *zhi* 知 knowing. Although his doctrine of *gewu zhizhi* 格物致知 the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge does entail a transcendent dimension in terms of the unification between mind and *li* 理 the Principle, the transcendent dimension remains as an ideal end which does not play the part of divine intervention; the whole process is thoroughly depicted as the way of accumulation. Furthermore, Zhu Xi endorses his method with a bottom-up structure, and firmly warns his pupils against the top-down type of scheme (1.2.1). To conclude, in Zhu Xi the act of knowing indicates a process of accumulating the knowledge of things, which results in an ideal state, namely the ultimate knowledge of *xin* 心 the mind or mind-heart and a comprehensive understanding of *li* 理 the Principle. Zhu Xi lays emphasis on the active fashion of man's intellective operation, and likewise gives more attention to the positive way of expression. Unsurprisingly, in the context of Zhu Xi knowing is hardly associated with purification, nor is intellect a receptive power, which is contrary to what we find in Eckhart.

- Intellect, Life and Creation

As mentioned above, the notion of knowing in both Zhu Xi and Eckhart is not unfolded entirely within an epistemological framework in terms of the object-subject dichotomy, but concerns one's metaphysical and spiritual questioning. To know something, in Zhu Xi's term, is to quest for the principle of that thing which also exists virtually in the mind. Thus the pursuit of the principle of an external thing does not end in the thing that is known, but reflexively brings light to the intellective function of the mind. Put more bluntly, one comes to realise one's own power of knowing by knowing something outside. The activity of knowing is nothing like a mechanical logical inference on the ground of instrumental rationality; rather, knowing always pertains to the knower's self-realisation and *li* 理 the Principle. Therefore, in the context of Zhu Xi knowing is not a lifeless, heartless activity, but forms a link with one's being and life. Nonetheless it is plain that the hierarchical order of creature – to be, to live, to know – that Eckhart takes for granted is foreign to Confucian tradition. Despite the fact that what Zhu Xi means by *li* 理 the Principle has a cosmological implication, we cannot find in Zhu Xi's thought a direct link between intellect, life and creation as seen in Eckhart (2.2.2.2, a & b). The notion of the divine intellect that is essential to Eckhart's thinking of creation is entirely absent in Zhu Xi; as is the connection and division between the divine and

human intellect, because in Confucian tradition the cosmological thinking which intends to explain the formation of the world and the movement of the universe is more closely tied up with concepts such as *qi* 氣 the cosmic matter, *yinyang* 阴阳 the negative and positive force, and *wuxing* 五行 the five elements. Although Zhu Xi attempts to integrate the concept of *li* 理 the Principle into the traditional cosmological framework, so that in his system both *li* 理 the Principle and *qi* 氣 the cosmic matter play an essential role in forming and the sustaining the whole universe,<sup>562</sup> his expounding of *li* 理 the Principle does not form a comparison with the Eckhartian notion of the divine intellect. In his commentaries, especially the *Commentary on John*, Eckhart reads a great deal of Platonic teaching into the scriptural text, and clearly interprets God as the divine intellect which has contained the Idea of the world and instantly created the whole world by the Idea of it. That Idea of course is identified with Christ, the Son or the Word in Christian tradition. In Eckhart the concept of intellect is often accompanied by the Platonic notion of idea, which pertains to creation and comprehension; hence intellect is not only in charge of understanding, but also entails the power to generate, or is the source of life. Hence is seen in Eckhart the direct link between intellect, life and creation. The situation is rather different in Zhu Xi and in Confucian tradition, where the generative power is most often attributed to *qi* 氣 the cosmic matter in cosmological terms, and to the virtue of *ren* 仁 humaneness in moral terms. So long as Zhu Xi stands in the Confucian tradition, his concept of *li* 理 the Principle and his emphasis on *zhi* 知 knowing cannot theoretically fuse comprehension and generation/creation into one, to the extent that Eckhart has done on a Platonic platform.

### 3.2 The Problematique of Hermeneutics in Zhu Xi and Meister Eckhart

As seen in Chapters 1 and 2, the concept of the human intellect in both Zhu Xi and Eckhart involves a highly complicated hermeneutical framework. Indeed, the expression of their thinking and the thinking itself cannot be separated; the hermeneutical framework in which the notion of the human intellect is unfolded deserves no less attention than the notion itself.

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<sup>562</sup> As pointed out by John H. Berthrong, distinctive of Zhu Xi's account of creativity is that he modifies the classical sources through a pair of concepts – *li* 理 and *qi* 氣. Zhu discovers creativity in the dynamic side of his speculative system, with the primordial power of *qi* 氣 when linked to the axiological power of *li* 理. It follows that in Zhu Xi *li* 理 Principle does not create by itself, but actually functions as the model of things. Hence it is the restless *qi* 氣 that gives birth to the universe of things when it is informed by Principle. See John H. Berthrong, *Concerning Creativity: A Comparison of Chu Hsi, Whitehead, and Neville* (1998), 126.



- Hermeneutical Rules in Zhu Xi and Eckhart

Clearly the issue of hermeneutics is at stake in both contexts. To both Zhu Xi and Eckhart, the problem of hermeneutics is not the art of understanding in general, but precisely the art of understanding and interpreting scriptures. In both Zhu Xi and Eckhart the hermeneutical issue is closely entangled with scriptural learning, and the hermeneutical concern is almost solely derived from their exegetical practice. In neither context do the expositions of hermeneutical rules appear separately, but they always accompany and are accompanied by scriptural commentaries. Neither thinker shows an interest in formulating a theory about the art of understanding in the modern sense. Since in both contexts the hermeneutical issues are tied up with scriptural exegesis, the problem of hermeneutics in Zhu Xi and Eckhart is largely subject to the task of commentary writing, and the hermeneutical rules given by both thinkers are meant to provide the reader with general guidelines in order that their philosophical interpretations will be properly understood. On the other hand, these rules also serve to justify their own interpretations, in particular the innovative ideas they put forward in their commentaries. Zhu Xi and Eckhart have much in common with regard to the link between hermeneutical issues and scriptural exegesis. In other words, the hermeneutical problem concerns the two thinkers in a very similar way. Since in both contexts the scope of hermeneutics is confined to the study of scriptures, accordingly the hermeneutical rules prescribed by both thinkers serve the same purpose, namely to enhance the understanding of the sacred scriptural texts.

Despite such common ground, some fundamental differences are found between Zhu Xi and Eckhart in terms of the detailed contents of the hermeneutical rules. As the study of scriptures is conducted in different ways in the two traditions, accordingly different questions are raised with regard to the proper way to understand and interpret a scriptural text. Based on the details presented in Chapter 1 (1.2.1) and Chapter 2 (2.2.1), we will make some observations upon the hermeneutical rules in Zhu Xi and Eckhart, so that the differences between the two will be brought to light.

Zhu Xi lays more emphasis on the kind of submissive and receptive mentality in scriptural learning, and repeatedly warns his students against the subjective stance to scriptural texts. His criticism of the subjective attitude towards scripture is partly driven by a pedagogical concern; indeed, overall the hermeneutical rules in Zhu Xi are prescribed mainly for educational purposes, and to a great extent reflect his life-long

insistence on *xiaxue shangda* 下學上達 the bottom-up procedure. It is not hard to see that these hermeneutical rules are meant to be practical and concrete, and will become incomprehensible once disassociated from Zhu Xi's own teaching experience and exegetical practice. The hermeneutical rules as seen in Zhu Xi's *Yulei* 語類 *Conversations* and *Huowen* 或問 *Q&A* are no more than detailed instructions concerning how to understand and interpret scripture; as a whole they speak of the practical method for scriptural learning, and hardly touch on anything abstract.

In comparison with Zhu Xi, Eckhart seems to be more concerned with general discussions over the problem of hermeneutics in his time, such as the source of truth, the possible growth of the meaning of a scriptural text, the spiritual and literal meaning of words, and the compatibility between what is seen in nature, what is found in philosophy and what is revealed in scripture. Living in the age of scholasticism, Eckhart cannot be oblivious to the controversial questions as to the relation between faith and reason, theology and philosophy, the illuminating light of the divine and the light of natural reason. He evidently keeps them in mind whilst composing commentaries on the holy scriptures, as is seen from the fact that Eckhart attaches a prologue to each of his commentaries, and a *General Prologue* to his *Opus Tripartitum*, each of which contains some hermeneutical rules that are designed to account for the style of the forthcoming commentary and the innovative ideas contained in it. Overall these rules, although they are to be applied specifically to Eckhart's biblical commentaries, actually reflect his solution to the aforementioned hermeneutical difficulties, typically arising from the academic standard of scholasticism.

- Scriptural Ground for Philosophical Speculation

A cross-reading of Zhu Xi and Eckhart makes it clear that the medieval Christian theologians and the Confucian masters shared a very similar academic goal, to embed independent thinking into the scriptural ground. Both thinkers blend philosophical ideas into a commentary on scriptural text. Thus, in both contexts we find a tension between original thinking and traditional doctrines, as well as the conscientious effort to ease and resolve such an unavoidable tension. Under such an intellectual circumstance philosophical thinking is not to be dissociated from scriptural learning; philosophical speculation is developed almost exclusively into a philosophical reading of a transmitted text, and in that sense philosophical questioning is merged into the

longstanding tradition of scriptural learning. In both contexts, philosophical speculation does not stand on its own; even in Eckhart's scholastic *quaestiones* the philosophical discussions and debates are conducted under a theological title, which is undoubtedly rooted in the Holy Bible. To a medieval Christian theologian like Meister Eckhart and a medieval Confucian master like Zhu Xi, it is almost a norm that one ought to think through scriptures, and philosophical thinking should be provided with a scriptural ground; as a result, in both the medieval Latin and the medieval Chinese world, philosophical glosses are incorporated in scriptural exegeses, and philosophical interpretation of scriptures is in vogue.

It must be noted that to form a scriptural commentary with the aid of philosophical terms is much more demanding and complicated than simply constructing a systematic philosophical or theological discourse, because the former entails persistent striving for a balance between the passive assimilation of the scriptural meaning and the subjective personal appropriation of scriptures, which requires original thinking and one's unique experiential approach. Thus in both traditions the genre of commentary calls for mastery of scriptural knowledge as well as maturity in philosophical thinking. Unsurprisingly, the task of commentary writing is exclusively assigned to the most prominent thinkers of the day. Both Zhu Xi and Eckhart seem to have lived up to that standard in delivering their own scriptural interpretation. Both accomplished this enormous task, Zhu Xi with his *Sishu Zhangju Jizhu* 四書章句集註 *Commentary on the Four Books*, and Eckhart with the *Commentary on John*, *Commentary on Genesis* and *Commentary on Exodus*.

As seen in their commentaries, both Zhu Xi and Eckhart treat scripture as the primary authority, and also take the scholarly tradition of scriptural exegesis into account. This is most clearly illustrated by the fact that both Zhu Xi and Eckhart refer to the expert views of the past and present before proposing a new idea; they both skilfully summarise the exegetical sources at their disposal, and further integrate them into their own commentaries. Although both Zhu Xi and Eckhart often resort to more than one preceding commentator and master, their work does suggest a remarkable affinity with the one predecessor from whom they have learned most. In the case of Zhu Xi the most important predecessor is obviously Cheng Yi; distinctive of Zhu Xi's commentary as a whole is his blending of Cheng Yi's philosophy into a concise line-by-line commentary on the ancient scriptures, in particular the text of *The Great Learning*. Zhu Xi repeatedly mentions the groundwork achieved by Cheng Yi and takes what he puts in the

*Supplement* as no more than paraphrasing master Cheng's thought. It seems that in his commentaries Zhu Xi tries to play down the originality of his thinking, and always lets his predecessors speak for him. In Eckhart it is difficult to spot which previous master he is most indebted to when reading his commentaries, but in a number of prologues Eckhart reminds the reader that the work of his Dominican brother Thomas deserves particular attention. Like Zhu Xi, Eckhart rarely draws attention to his own original thought. Only in *Parisian Questions* does he make it clear where he disagrees with or even surpasses Thomas. The continuity between Thomas and Eckhart is most clearly displayed in Eckhart's disputed questions, where Eckhart's scholastic debate always starts with a Thomistic view, which is followed by his own thought.

Through the means of writing scriptural commentaries both Zhu Xi and Eckhart demonstrate a strong affinity with the thinking of the previous commentators in the same tradition. Their own perspectives hardly come to the fore, and the originality of their thinking is often implicitly expressed by quoting the past and present scholars. Through the form of commentary Zhu Xi and Eckhart make it clear how strongly they are affiliated with their own intellectual tradition, and how much contribution they have made. To both Zhu Xi and Eckhart the scriptural texts upon which their commentaries are built are sacred, in the sense that these texts have a divine origin. In both contexts it is seen that scripture serves to gauge personal thinking, and a thoroughly intellectual penetration of scripture is grounded on a firm faith in that scripture. In both traditions commentary writing effectively fulfils the role of preserving and promoting the traditional values and fundamental doctrines, hence inevitably it serves pedagogical purposes in the long run.

Despite the importance of the genre of scriptural commentary in both contexts, a difference is found between Zhu Xi and Eckhart with regard to its rank. As presented in Chapter 1 (1.3), scriptural commentary in the Confucian tradition carries much more weight than a philosophical treatise. Zhu Xi's *Sishu Zhangju Jizhu* 四書章句集註 *Commentary on the Four Books* is followed by *Sishu Huowen* 四書或問 *Questions and Answers Concerning The Four Books*, and the latter is intended to expound at length what is only briefly touched upon in the former. As Zhu Xi tells his pupils, the philosophical expositions presented in *Q&A* are subordinate to the *Commentary*; one should start with the *Commentary* and read *Q&A* afterwards. In Eckhart, the order is reversed. In his *Opus Tripartitum* Eckhart allows the *Book of Propositions* to open the whole corpus, and particularly points out that these propositions hold the key to

understanding the following *quaestiones* and commentaries (2.1.2, 1). Unlike Zhu Xi, Eckhart asks the reader to proceed from the propositions to *quaestiones* and commentaries.

The main reason for such a difference probably lies in another role of Zhu Xi's commentaries, namely to rehabilitate the divine lineage of Confucianism. That seems to be irrelevant to Eckhart's purpose of commentary writing. Zhu Xi's reconstruction project largely depends on his *Sishu Zhangju Jizhu* 四書章句集註 *Commentary on the Four Books*; the intellectual development as presented in his commentaries also implicitly delineates the transmission of the divine lineage (1.1.1). Therefore his academic attempt to restore the scholarly tradition also serves the purpose of enhancing one's faith in the sacred nature of Confucian scriptures which, in turn, determines the spiritual identity of Confucian adherents. Although Zhu Xi's commentary writing is not explicitly homiletic in nature, it does entail a strong sense of mission, which contributes to his downplaying of the philosophical speculations as seen in *Huowen* 或問 *Q&A*. From a homiletic point of view, *Sishu Zhangju Jizhu* 四書章句集註 *Commentary on the Four Books* is far more important than *Sishu Huowen* 四書或問 *Questions and Answers Concerning The Four Books*, hence the latter is deemed a footnote to the former, and by extension a footnote to a footnote in relation to the scriptural text itself.

By comparison, philosophical speculation has a more significant role to play in Eckhart's work, especially in his *quaestiones*, where philosophical debate is judged on its own merit and is allowed to run its course without being interrupted by scriptural authority. Overall, living during the prime of medieval scholasticism Eckhart enjoyed the freedom to develop speculative theology in the form of *quaestio*; even in his biblical commentaries, he can still find sufficient room for philosophical discussion. Moreover, Eckhart does not set restrictions on the length of his commentaries, hence we have the extensive commentaries in which Eckhart tries to exhaust the possible interpretations of a selected verse, in order to deepen and broaden one's understanding of scripture to the utmost. To a scholastic theologian like Eckhart, the pagan philosophers are no less important than the prominent church fathers; not only was Aristotle's work treated as canonical,<sup>563</sup> but the works of his Arabic commentators were also well received in the

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<sup>563</sup> According to Jacqueline Hamesse's observation, numerous theologians reacted against the new methods employed to treat theological questions; from the end of the twelfth century their criticism of and opposition to Aristotelianism was extensive. Nevertheless, by the second half of the thirteenth century we are far from the first quarrels and spirited reactions that had taken place against philosophy

Latin world. From Augustine to Boethius philosophy had long been deemed an essential aid to scriptural reading; although anti-intellectualism figures like Tertullian had their voices heard, overall philosophical thinking continued to have a remarkable bearing on both scriptural interpretation and speculative theology within the Christian tradition. With the thriving of the scholastic movement in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, the vital importance of philosophy was dramatically displayed in the form of *quaestiones*.

Compared with their Christian counterparts, Neo-Confucian masters like Zhu Xi and his predecessor Cheng Yi seem to be more dubious about the role of philosophical speculation, despite the fact that they have already engaged in philosophical debate when trying to prove theoretically the superiority of Confucian doctrines over the teaching of Buddhism and Daoism. There seems always to be an effort to maintain the purity of Confucian doctrine, and philosophical concepts originated from other schools of thought are treated with particular caution. Philosophical speculation does not stand on its own; nor is it to be judged on its own merit. Indeed, philosophical thinking must be carried out on the ground of scriptures and must be expressed in the form of scriptural interpretation; original thinking will not be appreciated unless it has a foothold in scripture and finds a way to merge into the current of the whole tradition. Otherwise it remains at the level of personal interest and has little to contribute to the Confucian tradition. Accordingly, in Confucian tradition a philosophical reading of scripture does not gain legitimacy due to its structural or logical beauty; the conformity between the philosophical interpretation and the original meaning of the scriptural text will be ceaselessly questioned: indeed, the legitimacy of Zhu Xi's commentary is still being questioned by many Confucian scholars today. The sort of systematic intellectual penetration of scripture represented by Zhu Xi's treatment of *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning* is an extraordinary conduct within Confucian tradition. Despite the heated discussions over some philosophical questions within the circle of Neo-Confucian intellectuals, in particular the historical debate between Zhu Xi and Lu Xiangshan which speaks of the fundamental divergence between *Li Xue* 理學 the school of Principle and *Xin Xue* 心學 the school of mind within the Neo-Confucian context, it is plain that

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and in particular against Aristotelianism. If resistance still cropped up, the context in which it arose had changed. The majority of writings by theologians made room for philosophical arguments and also treated speculative problems. The role of Aristotelianism in the apprenticeship of reason was no longer disputed. For details, see Jacqueline Hamesse, 'Theological Quaestiones Quodlibetales', in Christopher Schabel (ed.), *Theological Quodlibeta in the Middle Ages: The Thirteenth Century* (Leiden and Boston, 2006), 21-2.

the debate between Zhu Xi and his contemporary peers is not conducted according to the syllogistic rules that a scholastic theologian like Eckhart must follow in his work, whether through disputed questions or scriptural commentaries.

- Opening up New Directions: Zhu Xi's *Q&A* and Eckhart's MHG Sermons

The style of Zhu Xi's *Q&A* invites comparison with that of Eckhart's sermons in Middle High German, because both represent a new way of expression which exceeds the conventional standard to which most of their contemporaries aspire.

Zhu Xi is probably the first thinker in the Neo-Confucian movement to develop a systematic philosophical discourse to spell out his own idea, which is only slightly hinted at in his scriptural commentary. Thus we have a sophisticated and well-structured *Sishu Huowen* 四書或問 *Questions and Answers Concerning the Four Books* (1.3.1.2), which is closely bound up with his masterpiece *Sishu Zhangju Jizhu* 四書章句集註 *Commentaries on the Four Books*. Zhu Xi's *Q&A* fulfils two different roles: internally it serves to expound what he has written in the commentaries; while externally *Q&A* as a whole is no less than a systematic philosophical apology for Confucian values, which distinguishes theoretically the Confucian stance and perspective from those of Buddhism and Daoism. Zhu Xi's *Q&A* represents a new apologetic attempt in the scholarly tradition within Confucianism, and is indicative of Zhu Xi's awareness of the categorical gap between a faithful stance towards scriptural texts and the striving for creative, independent thinking. It is through *Q&A* that Zhu Xi openly integrates philosophical argument into scriptural learning. As an attachment to the commentary, *Q&A* forms an indirect link with the scriptural texts, which obviously creates a new platform for in-depth discussion over the controversial issues arising from the commentary, so that the need of an inquisitive and erudite reader will be met. The genre of *Q&A* and the quality of the debate unfolded in this work suggest a new approach, which calls for thorough intellectual penetration of the transmitted scriptural texts.

The same sort of pioneering work that Zhu Xi accomplishes in his *Q&A*, we may say that Eckhart achieves in his MHG sermons, noticeably in a much more straightforward manner. Unlike many of his contemporary scholastic theologians, who believe that lofty ideas can only be taught to the well educated, Eckhart adopts the vernacular language and allows it to transmit the same message he has put forward in his scholastic

Latin work. When preaching in MHG, Eckhart is not content with delivering a diluted version of his thought to his audience, but always attempts to get the message across in its entirety. For that purpose he often plays with words and stretches the use of language to the limit. The depth of his vernacular sermons makes it clear that Eckhart has thoroughly exposed to the taught and untaught his profound theological thinking and spiritual insights, which are supposed to be exclusively reserved for the well-trained mature mind. Unsurprisingly, the power of his vernacular sermons was soon felt by many; the seemingly daring and provocative tone aroused shock and misunderstanding in the clerics and laity alike, and as a result Eckhart's teaching was scrutinised by the inquisitors on suspicion of heresy. Confronted with misjudgement and misunderstanding, Eckhart does not hold back his view. He argues that even Saint John begins his holy gospel with the most exalted thoughts that any man could utter about God, and allows these thoughts to be open to all believers and unbelievers, so that they might believe. Surely it is our duty to teach the untaught, so that they may be changed from uninstructed to instructed.<sup>564</sup> To those who misunderstand him, Eckhart's response remains the same: 'It is enough for me that what I say and write be true in me and in God.'<sup>565</sup> To Eckhart, the truth of his words is a matter that concerns only himself and God; the element of truth in his teaching will not be diminished or affected by the misconceptions of his rivals.

Despite the contextual differences, both Zhu Xi and Eckhart manage to open up new directions in their own traditions. Although both are trying to promote something unconventional, Zhu Xi seems to be more concerned with the effect of his teaching. In order to prevent misunderstanding and confusion, he allowed *Q&A* to be circulated only among a small circle of pupils and friends. In his view, the argumentative style of *Q&A* may have done more harm than good to someone who was not yet ready to take it on board, and therefore it was not meant for wide publication, but was to be reserved for the few who could understand the depth of his questions and share his interest in philosophical speculation. Similarly, Zhu Xi is much more cautious about giving philosophical interpretation of scripture. In his system, philosophical thinking is always treated as the means to enhance scriptural learning. On the one hand, Zhu Xi

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<sup>564</sup> Eckhart, *Liber Benedictus I* (DW V 60,28-61,8) (trans. Edmund Colledge in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 239).

<sup>565</sup> Eckhart, *Liber Benedictus I* (DW V 60,13-4) (trans. . Edmund Colledge in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 239).



employs a set of philosophical glosses in the commentaries so as to systematise Confucian doctrine; on the other hand, he maintains a submissive stance towards scripture, to ensure that the philosophical terms in his commentary will never overshadow the scripture itself. Thus, throughout his academic career, the following order of priority of his works is strongly recommended: *Sishu* 四書 *The Four Books*, then *Sishu Zhangju Jizhu* 四書章句集註 *Commentaries on the Four Books*, and finally *Sishu Huowen* 四書或問 *Questions and Answers Concerning the Four Books*.

To understand this priority order, we have to take into account the goal of the Neo-Confucian movement, which is to reconstruct Confucianism. This reconstruction, occurring in the Song Dynasty (960-1279), is a revival of Confucian scriptural learning, and is associated with commentaries on Confucian classics. Given the fundamental importance of scriptural learning to the reconstruction project, it is understandable why Zhu Xi continually calls on the reader to focus on the scripture, and tries so hard to integrate his philosophical thinking, namely *Li Xue* 理學 the doctrine of the Principle, into the longstanding tradition of *Jing Xue* 經學 scriptural learning.

But if we shift our attention to the structure of Zhu Xi's system itself, and concentrate on the formation of his thought, the priority order among scripture, commentary and Q&A will be reversed. Noticeably it is his philosophical thinking, *Li Xue* 理學 the doctrine of the Principle, that distinguishes his commentaries from the previous ones. His reading of scripture bears a clear rationalistic mark and the concept of *Li* 理 the Principle is applied to interpreting nearly all the cardinal concepts in the Confucian classics. Furthermore, the variation in the meaning of those concepts is explicit. Taking the word 'tian 天 Heaven' as an example, 'tian 天' literally means the natural 'sky'; in religious texts it normally refers to the universal force acting as an invisible deity whose pervasive power could form a divine intervention in social affairs and private life, and in that sense it serves as the object of veneration to which personal prayers are addressed. Zhu Xi's interpretation of 'tian 天 Heaven' is stunningly different and concise: 'tian, ji li ye 天, 即理也 Heaven, meaning Principle'.<sup>566</sup> Here the status of 'Heaven' is simply substituted by that of 'Principle'. Another fundamental Confucian concept, 'xing 性 nature' is treated in the same fashion: 'xing ji tianli 性即天理 nature means the heavenly

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<sup>566</sup> Zhu Xi, *LYJZ, Juan 2*, in *Sishu Zhangju Jizhu* 四書章句集註 *Commentaries on the Four Books* (1983), 65.

Principle’ .<sup>567</sup> Similarly, the central concept in Confucius’ *Analects*, ‘ren 仁 humaneness’, is interpreted as ‘renzhe, aizhili, xinzhide ye 仁者，愛之理，心之德也 the Principle of love and the property of mind’.<sup>568</sup> Suffice it to say that Zhu Xi’s scriptural interpretation relies heavily on the concept of *li* 理 the Principle, which characterises the whole project of his intellectual reconstruction of Confucianism. Certainly one cannot understand Zhu Xi’s commentary without first grasping his philosophy; for that purpose, one has to read his *Q&A* as Zhu Xi’s own ideas are condensed into this work.<sup>569</sup>

To sum up, both Zhu Xi and Meister Eckhart regard scriptures as the inexhaustible source of truth and inspiration, thus dialoguing with scriptural texts becomes essential to philosophical speculation and spiritual contemplation. In both contexts language is not deemed an obstacle to spiritual progress, nor is discursive reasoning to be abandoned or despised. The power of knowing located in the human soul or mind holds the key to the ultimate truth. Truth, scripture, spiritual contemplation and religious praxis are dominated by the power of knowing which is no longer confined to empirical approach to the world, hence the human intellect should be considered in spiritual, transcendental or eternal terms. In Eckhart, the apophatic nature makes intellect the path leading to detachment; in Zhu Xi, knowing is rooted in human nature, hence constitutes the ground for Confucian learning and personal cultivation.

In short, both Zhu Xi and Meister Eckhart highlight the primacy of knowing and both intend to justify this innovative thesis by resorting to the sacred scriptures. The natural bond between the holy nature of scriptural texts and the knowing power in us as presented in both Zhu Xi and Eckhart, makes it clear that in both contexts knowing indicates the immersive potential which is open to religious praxis, spiritual contemplation, philosophical discussion, scientific observation and even moral cultivation. When Eckhart defines God as intellect rather than being, he is also shifting the attention to the knowing power in us; similarly in Zhu Xi, when the massive project of reconstruction is built upon the doctrine of the investigation of things and extension of knowledge, the same message can be derived, which is to probe the Principle by

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<sup>567</sup> Zhu Xi, *MZJZ*, Juan 11, in *Sishu Zhangju Jizhu* 四書章句集註 *Commentaries on the Four Books* (1983), 325.

<sup>568</sup> Zhu Xi, *LYJZ*, Juan 1, in *Sishu Zhangju Jizhu* 四書章句集註 *Commentaries on the Four Books* (1983), 48.

<sup>569</sup> Qian Mu suggests that one should read *Huowen* 或問 *Questions & Answers* first, then *Yulei* 語類 *Conversations*, see Qian Mu 錢穆, *Zhuzi Xin Xue An* 朱子新學案 *A New Anthology of Zhu Xi*, in *Qian Binsi Xianshen Quanj* 錢賓四先生全集 *Complete Works of Qian Mu* (1998), 14, 257.

bringing the power of knowing into action, thus we are open to the whole universe and have the potential to know and to be everything. Let this be an inspiration from both Zhu Xi and Meister Eckhart.

## Conclusion: A Radical Difference – Intent for Orthodoxy in Zhu Xi and Openness to Diversity in Meister Eckhart

The difference in the reception of Zhu Xi and Eckhart is immediately apparent when considered from a historical perspective. While Zhu Xi was canonised as a national icon and dominated Chinese academia for six centuries, Eckhart was condemned as a heretic not long after his death. Such posthumous glory and condemnation urge us to seek out the decisive factors that contributed to these different receptions. However, to do so would require a thorough exploration of the respective historical facts, which is obviously beyond the scope of this study. What we intend to point out are the internal reasons deriving from the characteristics of their thinking, which can be deemed complementary to the historical observation that focuses on the external factors affecting the reception of the two systems of thought. Unsurprisingly, we have a great deal to investigate in order to understand the influence that Zhu Xi's thought has exerted on the society of China, Japan and Korea, and have relatively much less to say on the impact of Eckhart, due to the condemnation imposed upon his thought and the consequent ban on his academic work that lasted for several centuries.

Leaving aside all the external factors,<sup>570</sup> we are confronted with the question: 'What are the internal reasons for Zhu Xi's posthumous glory and Eckhart's condemnation?' Put more bluntly, what made Zhu Xi's thought so appealing to an existing political regime, and what made Eckhart's ideas so threatening to the Catholic Church of which he was a part?

Let us start with Zhu Xi. As pointed out by Tillman, Zhu Xi's posthumous success cannot be separated from the deliberate, long-term preparation made by his disciples and by Zhu Xi himself. Tillman provides historical evidence that in his last twenty years Zhu Xi demonstrated an increasingly strong intent towards orthodoxy, or even to uphold his own exclusive authority among the circle of Neo-Confucians, to elevate his scriptural commentary to the level of authentic, orthodox Confucian learning, and to present himself as the legitimate, authoritative commentator of Confucian classics. This is typically seen in Zhu Xi's three consecutive texts: *Dao Lü Bogong Wen* 悼呂伯恭文 *Eulogy for Lü ZuQian* (1181), *Zhong Yong Xu* 《中庸》序 *Preface to the Doctrine of the*

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<sup>570</sup> Wing-Tsit Chan particularly highlights the significant role played by Zhu Xi's disciples in publicising Zhu's teaching after his death. As a group they made systematic preparations for the canonisation of Zhu Xi and the domination of his thought. See Wing-Tsit Chan 陈荣捷, *Zhuzi Menren* 朱子门人 *The Disciples of Zhu Xi* (Shanghai, 2007).

*Mean* (1189), and *Cangzhou Jingshe Gao Xianshen Wen* 滄州精舍告先聖文 *Prayer to the Spirit of Confucius at the Temple of Cangzhou* (1194), in which he coins the terminology *wudang* 吾黨 our party, and openly issues a personal claim to *daotong* 道統 the transmission of the Way after the death of the three eminent masters, Zhang Shi 張栻 (1133-1180), Lü Zuqian 呂祖謙 (1137-1181) and Lu Xiangshan 陸象山 (1139-1193). On that account Tillman comes to the conclusion that in his last twenty years Zhu Xi deliberately set out to redefine the meaning of *daoxue* 道學 the school of Dao, and gradually to narrow down the circle of Neo-Confucian scholars; as a result the four coexisting groups within the Song Neo-Confucian context were transformed into one school of thought according to the criterion set up by Zhu Xi for the so-called ‘*chun ru* 純儒 authentic Confucianism’.<sup>571</sup> Thanks to his long-term plan and preparation, the diversity of the Song Neo-Confucianism was eventually replaced by the authority of Zhu Xi.

In addition, Tillman makes the point that religious activity, as shown in Zhu Xi’s *Prayer to the Spirit of Confucius*, played a significant part in the daily routine of the academic world he led. With whatever intentions in mind, Zhu Xi began to push himself to the centre of attention, almost as a mediator between the spirit of Confucius and those Confucian learners. Meanwhile, he embarked upon the academic project of establishing an orthodox line of Confucian learning, so that the meaning of orthodoxy was narrowed down to his own interpretation of scriptures, and *Si Shu* 四書 *The Four Books*, edited and commented by Zhu Xi, became canonical to his followers even before it was formally authorised by the throne.<sup>572</sup>

Tillman’s historical observation is partly confirmed by Yu Yingshi’s much more complicated account of Zhu Xi’s political involvement in his last twenty years, although Yu seems not to resonate with Tillman’s point of view. What Yu has accomplished in his research amounts to a ground-breaking discovery that compels us to rethink the meaning of *neisheng waiwang* 內聖外王 inner sage and outer king in the Neo-Confucian

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<sup>571</sup> Hoyt Tillman 田浩, ‘Zhu Xi yu Daoxue de Fazhan Bianhua 朱熹与道学的发展变化 Zhu Xi and the Development and Changes of Neo-Confucianism’, in Wang Zhen 王震 (ed.), *Songdai Xin Ruxue de Jingshen Shijie-yi Zhuzi Xue we Zhongxin* 宋代新儒学的精神世界: 以朱子学为中心 *The Spiritual and Intellectual World of Neo-Confucianism in the Song Dynasty-with a focus on the study of Master Zhu* (2009), 16-22.

For more detailed research on the making of Neo-Confucianism in the Song Dynasty, see 陈来 Chen Lai (ed.), *Zaoqi Daoxue Huayu de Xingcheng yu Yanbian* 早期道学话语的形成与演变 *The Formation and Development of the Early Neo-Confucian Discourse* (Hefei, 2007).

<sup>572</sup> See Hoyt Tillman, ‘Prayers to the Spirit of Confucius and Claim to the Transmission of the Way’, *Philosophy East and West* 54 (October 2004), 489-513.

context, especially the correlation between the two sides - *neisheng* 內聖 inner sage, and *waiwang* 外王 outer king. To his surprise, Yu discovers that during the period of the Southern Song Neo-Confucianism led by Zhu Xi, Zhang Shi, Lü Zuqian and Lu Xiangshan gradually replaced the prevailing role of *jingxue* 經學 scriptural learning represented by Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021-1086), and became the intellectual force that shaped the ideology of the Southern Song. Although the Neo-Confucian masters of the Song unanimously agree that the goal of Neo-Confucianism is to attain sagehood, and that *neisheng* 內聖 inner sage is absolutely a prerequisite for *waiwang* 外王 outer king, they collectively call for the restoration of the social and political order in reality, so that the function of *neisheng* 內聖 inner sage lies in the achievement of *waiwang* 外王 outer king after all.<sup>573</sup>

Under this circumstance, the political concern of Zhu Xi did not diminish but actually gained momentum in his last twenty years. Like Lu Xiangshan and Zhang Shi, Zhu Xi never gave up the hope of forming a party made up of like-minded Confucian scholar-officials, so as to influence or even guide the emperor to wield political power in the right way. Taking into account the humiliating situation of the Southern Song regime, it is plain that the group of Confucian scholar-officials earnestly called for a change in the national direction, meaning to scrap the policy of compromising with the invaders, and to set up plans for resuming the sovereignty of the Song and regaining the lost land. Overall the Confucian masters' ambition to reconstruct the political order in a chaotic society coincides with their sense of mission to make the Way manifest in this world, and the means to achieve the political goal is no other than *de jun xingdao* 得君行道 to carry out the Way with the aid of the monarch, which explains why Confucian masters such as Zhang Shi and Lu Xiangshan expressed such deep affection for the emperor, who favoured that political ideal. This kind of emotion arising from the Confucian sense of minister-emperor relationship is so infectious that once caught up in it, one is never able to shake it off. Indeed, none of the Neo-Confucian masters in question are free from this deeply-rooted psychological complex.<sup>574</sup>

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<sup>573</sup> Yu Yingshi 余英时, *Zhu Xi de Lishi Shijie* 朱熹的历史世界 *The Historical World of Zhu Xi* (Beijing, 2004), 2, 412-5. A similar view is expressed by Roger Darrobers in his study of Zhu Xi's *fengshi* 封事 memorial, see Roger Darrobers 戴鹤白, 'Lun Zhu Xi de Gengzi Yingzhao Fengshi he Xinchou Yanhe Zouzha 论朱熹的《庚子应诏封事》和《辛丑廷和奏劄》 On Zhu Xi's Memorials in the year of Gengzi and Xinchou', trans. Li Guoqiang 李国强, in Chen Lai 陈来 (ed.), *Zhexue yu Shidai* 哲学与时代 *Philosophy and its Time* (Shanghai, 2012), 159-81.

<sup>574</sup> Yu Yingshi 余英时, *Zhu Xi de Lishi Shijie* 朱熹的历史世界 *The Historical World of Zhu Xi* (2004), 2, 449.

Seen in this light, Zhu Xi's deliberate bid for authority and self-proclamation of orthodoxy as depicted by Tillman should not be deemed testimony to his personal interest in self-glorification, but rather an expression of the typical sense of mission cultivated by a Confucian master. Surely, the sort of intent for orthodoxy or bid for exclusive authority so clearly demonstrated in Zhu Xi's intellectual output is an attempt to consolidate the group identity of the Neo-Confucian scholar-officials at the court of the Southern Song? Would self-denial have been a better solution for Zhu Xi when confronting their common political adversaries - a group of sophisticated, corrupt bureaucrats? Did he really have a choice after the death of the other three eminent leaders of the Neo-Confucian group? Here we see a circle whereby Zhu Xi's spiritual and intellectual affiliation with Confucianism does not allow him to walk away from his obligations to the state and to the emperor, and this political concern in turn has an immense impact on his intellectual enterprise, in particular, his work on *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning*.

It is clear that among *Si Shu* 四書 *The Four Books*, Zhu Xi gives far more weight to *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning* than to the other three. He was still polishing his commentary on the section of *chengyi* 誠意 sincerity of the will three days before his death;<sup>575</sup> indeed, Zhu Xi confessed that he devoted most of his energies to *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning*.<sup>576</sup> Why was Zhu Xi so deeply captivated by this short text? What makes it so important that it requires Zhu Xi's life-long dedication? Is it merely the difficulty arising from the structure that makes Zhu Xi spend decades on this text? To answer these questions, we have to consider the historical context, especially the sophisticated political game played out at the court of the Southern Song, in which he had wholeheartedly participated. As Yu Yingshi has hinted, once we place the Neo-Confucian masters back into the mainstream culture of the Song, and think in their terms, the importance of *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning* immediately becomes clear, because this is the only classical text that provides us with a dual carriageway between *neisheng* 內聖 inner sage, and *waiwang* 外王 outer king.<sup>577</sup>

This insightful observation sheds new light on the uniqueness of *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning*, and reveals the long-term deliberation and hesitation that Zhu Xi might

<sup>575</sup> Wang Maohong 王懋竑, *Zhu Xi Nianpu* 朱熹年譜 *A Chronology of Zhu Xi* (Beijing, 1998), 407.

<sup>576</sup> Zhu Xi, *ZZYL Juan 14*: “某於大學用工甚多。溫公作通鑑，言：臣平生精力，盡在此書。某於大學亦然。論孟中庸，卻不費力。友仁 錄” *ZZQS*(2002), 14, 430.

<sup>577</sup> Yu Yingshi 余英時, *Zhu Xi de Lishi Shijie* 朱熹的历史世界 *The Historical World of Zhu Xi* (2004), 2, 419.

have experienced in mapping out the two texts *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning* and *Zhong Yong* 中庸 *The Doctrine of the Mean*; both were singled out by the Song Neo-Confucians from *Li Ji* 禮記 *The Book of Rites* as scriptural basis for their reconstruction project. On the one hand, in *Zhong Yong Xu* 《中庸》序 *Preface to the Doctrine of the Mean*, Zhu Xi solemnly declares his theory of *daotong* 道統 the transmission of the Way, which makes *Zhong Yong* 中庸 *The Doctrine of the Mean* the canon that retains the spiritual lineage of Confucian tradition. On the other hand, Zhu Xi ranks *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning* the first among the four, and insists that this is the text that will initiate one into Confucian learning. Does he regard *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning* as one essential step towards *Zhong Yong* 中庸 *The Doctrine of the Mean*, so that his doctrine of *gewu zhizhi* 格物致知 the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge is to be incorporated into his theory of *xin* 心 mind? Or, conversely, does he take *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning* as containing the most comprehensive structure or framework of Confucianism, in which *Zhong Yong* 中庸 *The Doctrine of the Mean* is to be included? Zhu Xi does not seem to state categorically which text should be considered most important with regard to Confucian spirituality. Reading between the lines we come to see that Zhu Xi is trying to make *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning* the corner stone of Neo-Confucianism, so as to transform the classical Confucianism into a theoretically sound system in intellectual, spiritual and political terms.

As pointed out by Yu Yingshi, the political activities of Zhu Xi and his contemporaries compel us to rethink the political implications of Neo-Confucianism, and an overwhelming amount of historical evidence drives it home that the Neo-Confucian masters of the Song never confine themselves to the realm of *neisheng* 內聖 inner sage: rather than being content with personal spiritual progress, they all make efforts to proceed from *neisheng* 內聖 inner sage to *waiwang* 外王 outer king. Seen in this light *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning* should be given priority over *Zhong Yong* 中庸 *The Doctrine of the Mean*, because the political thought concerning the notion of *waiwang* 外王 outer king is clearly spelt out only in the former.

Along with the deepening political divergence between the professional bureaucrats and the Neo-Confucian scholar-officials, arose the need to formulate the theory of *daotong* 道統 the transmission of the Way, which adds enormous weight to *Zhong Yong* 中庸 *The Doctrine of the Mean*. Likewise, the necessity to justify *daoxue* 道學 the



learning of Dao pushed the Cheng-Zhu school to the fore, and the status of *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning* was raised to an unprecedented height as a result of that.<sup>578</sup>

Suffice it to say that Zhu Xi's emphasis on *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning* is entangled with his political concern, if not politically motivated. His last twenty years saw a series of intellectual activities to redefine *daotong* 道統 the transmission of the Way and *daoxue* 道學 the learning of Dao, with an intention to establish the orthodox line of thought within the Song Neo-Confucianism, to consolidate the group identity of the Song Neo-Confucians. As a response to the accusation against his thought Zhu Xi coined the term *zhengxue* 正學 the authentic learning to describe the school of the Principle represented by Cheng Yi and himself. Although at the time he died he was accused of promoting *weixue* 偽學 false learning, he had probably foreseen the political potential of his thought, namely to become the ideology of a political regime. In that sense the intent for orthodoxy expressed in intellectual terms can easily be transformed into an ideological tool to verify the legitimacy of a political authority, hence is more likely to serve a regime rather than to criticise it.

Given the moral implication and edificatory value of his philosophical thinking, Zhu Xi's concept of *li* 理 Principle allows the social and moral norms to be internalised, in the sense that Confucian moral norms are to be deemed the manifestation of *li* 理 Principle in human nature. Despite the originality of Zhu Xi's thinking, so long as he allows social order to be almost internalised as part of human nature, the power to criticise the existing society will inevitably be undermined. Zhu Xi's success in establishing the line of orthodoxy makes little room for independent thinking; as a result, the followers of this great master are prone to repeating what he has said rather than developing their own ideas.

By contrast, Eckhart has no intention regarding orthodoxy, let alone making his thought the exclusive orthodox teaching. Eckhart concentrates on what is stimulating to the mind, as seen in his disputed questions and scholastic commentaries. He does not undertake the apologetic task assumed by Zhu Xi, to make his Catholic doctrine the one and only orthodoxy; nor does he strive to make his own thinking prominent. Indeed, in contrast to Zhu Xi, in Eckhart we hardly see a concern for the posthumous

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<sup>578</sup> Despite the different roles of these texts, we still detect a subtle tension between them. The relation of the two texts is undoubtedly an interesting and complex topic that requires thorough exploration, which will be the task of another monograph on Zhu Xi.

dissemination of his teaching. As Oliver Davies puts it, peculiar to Eckhart's works is a sense of *presence of God*, which makes the reader feel that Eckhart himself 'bears a burden of truth'.<sup>579</sup> The word 'burden' vividly conveys the intimacy with God that Eckhart has to live with and live for. In mental and spiritual terms Eckhart is obsessed with this sweet burden of the divine presence, which compels him to write and to preach for the sake of the truth of eternity, regardless of all other considerations. As a result he was misunderstood by his simple-minded audience, as reported by Suso,<sup>580</sup> while at the same time being accused by the well-educated leaders of his church, in particular the archbishop of Cologne Henry of Virneburg, who initiated an inquisitorial charge against Eckhart in 1326. By quoting Augustine Eckhart pinpoints the problem of his adversaries, whom he sees as representative of the typical weakness of mankind, that of self-love. He sees very clearly that such self-love involves the desire to blind others so as to make one's own blindness hidden.<sup>581</sup> He pities those who have failed to understand his teaching, because 'their hearts are still fluttering around yesterday and tomorrow', despite their desire 'to contemplate and taste eternal things and the works of God, and to stand in the light of eternity'.<sup>582</sup>

It seems to be Eckhart's calling to speak the unspeakable and to articulate the incomprehensible; it is the nature of this task that determines his uncompromising stance and guarantees a radical difference between Eckhart and the free-spirited mystics. His thinking is theologically grounded to the extent that it always starts from God's point of view, and then proceeds from God to man. Probably for that reason Eckhart refuses to predicate God in ethical terms, which are derived from human life and human society. Likewise, virtues arising from human religious and spiritual life bear no eternal truth, and could become a hindrance to God should one believe otherwise. What Eckhart is preaching makes sense only to those who are capable of perceiving within themselves what no external vision has presented; otherwise, his teaching will be treated as erroneous if not heretical. For those who are not used to or are unable to go beyond images and bodily likeness and to conceive God as he is in himself, what

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<sup>579</sup> Oliver Davies (trans.), *Meister Eckhart: selected writings* (1994), XX.

<sup>580</sup> Suso in his *Little Book of Truth* explains how Eckhart's thought was misunderstood and misused by the heretical Free Spirits under the title 'the nameless wild one'. See Bernard McGinn, *The Harvest of Mysticism in Medieval Germany* (2005), 200.

<sup>581</sup> Eckhart, *Liber Benedictus I* (DW V 60,11-3) (trans. Edmund Colledge in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 239).

<sup>582</sup> Eckhart, *Liber Benedictus I* (DW V 60,17-8) (trans. Edmund Colledge in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 239).

Eckhart has said and written would be theologically wrong. Eckhart knows precisely where his audience may fall short in relation to the exalted matters he touches upon in his sermons and commentaries. Having made it clear that he cannot be accountable for other people's misunderstanding of his thought, Eckhart insists this kind of great and exalted teaching should be made available to the untaught, so that they may progress from uninstructed to instructed. It will be enough, Eckhart affirms, if what he has said and written is true in himself and in God.<sup>583</sup>

For Eckhart, the soul and God remain central and deeply rooted; everything else has to fade into the background. The message he is trying to deliver has little to do with piety or charity, meritorious deeds or practices of asceticism, but focuses on one theme: how God lives, gives birth and is also born in the soul. Eckhart clearly intends to enhance the meaning of Christian spirituality and to intensify the spiritual life of his audience; he constantly urges men and women under his pastoral care to go deeper than imitating Christ, and to be the sons or daughters of God. He is talking about something higher than the kind of customary religious life with which people are so content; he means to push them out of the comfort zone to explore further, but the depth of his message does not seem to be matched by the capacity of his unsophisticated audience, nor does it conform to the conventional doctrines of the Catholic Church. Therefore, his words can easily be interpreted as a form of heresy<sup>584</sup> that plays down the role of ethics and of church.

In many aspects Eckhart is unique; he is open to all the resources at his disposal yet remains at a noticeable distance from his intellectual predecessors. In addition to the Christian saints and church fathers, Eckhart had developed a strong affinity with the Jewish philosopher Maimonides, due to whose influence Eckhart forcefully enhances the way of negation, his apophatic theology, which serves better than Thomas's cataphatic theology to stimulate the mind of the audience or the reader. In that sense Eckhart's theology tends to destruct rather than construct, and helps to break away from an existing system of thought rather than to sustain it.

All in all, Eckhart's thought possesses the power to challenge rather than consolidate authority of any form, be it political, religious or spiritual; the dynamic nature of his

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<sup>583</sup> Eckhart, *Liber Benedictus I* (DW V 60,13-4) (trans. Edmund Colledge in *Essential Eckhart*, 1981, 239).

<sup>584</sup> For the historical background to the pursuit of heresy in the fourteenth century, see Bernard McGinn, *The Harvest of Mysticism in Medieval Germany* (2005), 64-73.

thinking is intended to stimulate the well-educated and to inspire or instruct the ignorant masses, which calls for innovativeness and suggests an unlimited openness to diversity. Eckhart's theological and philosophical thinking enables each individual soul to override the direct control of a religious organisation; to a great extent it also defies proclamation of religious orthodoxy as well as attachment to an orthodox line of thought. Not surprisingly this was deemed a persistent threat to a long-standing religious institution that claims absolute truth and demands unfailing faith. Even without the instigation of the archbishop of Cologne,<sup>585</sup> in all likelihood there would have been a tension between Eckhart's message and the dogmatics of the Catholic Church. Although the doctrine of the birth of the Son in the soul had been propounded prior to Eckhart, nowhere do we find a more vivid description of the intimacy between God and the soul, delivered in the vernacular Middle High German, or a more sophisticated philosophical explication, given in the scholastic Latin. In either form of expression the issue at stake is the inner life of individuals, without obligation to church, which implicitly narrows the sphere of religion down to the private zone, hence calling into question the necessity of the church's very existence.

To sum up, irrespective of the element of contingency in history, the contrast between Zhu Xi's striving for orthodoxy and Eckhart's openness to diversity explains why one was canonised and the other was condemned; the moral and political implications of their thought have, to a great extent, determined the striking difference in the posthumous dissemination of their works. Notwithstanding the striking differences regarding the historical fate of the two thinkers, points of resemblance are detected in their exegetical works, especially in their approach to the scriptural texts and their respective scholarly traditions. Both demonstrate in their works a high degree of intellectual brilliance and academic rigour, expressed through their expertise in scriptural learning, philosophical speculation and spiritual practice. If we may term Zhu Xi's doctrine of *zhi* 知 as a kind of intellectual spirituality, and Eckhart's thinking of the human intellect as a kind of intellectual mysticism, then we will be constantly reminded of the level of subtlety and complexity involved in their thought, which always challenges our intellectual capacity and refuses any form of vulgar interpretation.

What these two thinkers have achieved not only defies modern distinctions among philosophy, theology and spirituality, but compels us to probe the primary sources and

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<sup>585</sup> Oliver Davies (trans.), *Meister Eckhart: selected writings* (1994), xiv-xvii.

to seek for new angles and new language to accommodate the richness of their ideas and, one would hope, to bridge the two long-standing intellectual traditions by cross-reading of their works. By adopting a comparative model and focusing on the issue of the human intellect this book is intended as an attempt in that direction, as a comparative perspective not only allows us to read their works in their own contexts, but more importantly calls for a mutual enlightenment between the two thinkers, which makes it inevitable that we break through disciplinary distinctions and cultural boundaries.

## Appendix 1

### A Comparison of the Four Editions of The Great Learning

The original texts in Chinese: <sup>586</sup>

郑玄	程颢	程颐	朱熹
大學之道，在明明德， <b>在親民</b> ，在止于至善。	大學之道，在明明德， <b>在親民</b> ，在止于至善。	大學之道，在明明德， <b>在親當作新<sup>587</sup>民</b> ，在止于至善。	大學之道，在明明德， <b>在親民</b> ，在止于至善。 <b>程子曰：親當作新。</b>
知止而後在定，定而後能靜，靜而後能安，安而後能慮，慮而後能得。 物有本末，事有終始。知所先後，則近道矣。 古之欲明明德于天下者，先治其國。欲治其國者，先齊其家，欲齊其家者，先修其身。欲修其身者，先正其心。欲正其心者，先誠其意。欲誠其意者，先致其知。致知在格物。物格而後知至，知至而後意誠，意誠而後心正，心正而後身修，身修而後家齊，家齊而後國治，國治而後天下平。自天子以至于庶人，壹是皆以修身爲本。	知止而後在定，定而後能靜，靜而後能安，安而後能慮，慮而後能得。 物有本末，事有終始。知所先後，則近道矣。	知止而後在定，定而後能靜，靜而後能安，安而後能慮，慮而後能得。 物有本末，事有終始。知所先後，則近道矣。 古之欲明明德于天下者，先治其國。欲治其國者，先齊其家，欲齊其家者，先修其身。欲修其身者，先正其心。欲正其心者，先誠其意。欲誠其意者，先致其知。致知在格物。物格而後知至，知至而後意誠，意誠而後心正，心正而後身修，身修而後家齊，家齊而後國治，國治而後天下平。自天子以至于庶人，壹是皆以修身爲本。	知止而後在定，定而後能靜，靜而後能安，安而後能慮，慮而後能得。 物有本末，事有終始。知所先後，則近道矣。 古之欲明明德于天下者，先治其國。欲治其國者，先齊其家，欲齊其家者，先修其身。欲修其身者，先正其心。欲正其心者，先誠其意。欲誠其意者，先致其知。致知在格物。物格而後知至，知至而後意誠，意誠而後心正，心正而後身修，身修而後家齊，家齊而後國治，國治而後天下平。自天子以至于庶人，壹是皆以修身爲本。

<sup>586</sup> A brief note on the colours used in the table: 1) passages with background colour indicate the differences among each other; 2) passages without background colour and with fore colour are meant to show the differences in the order of the relevant texts among the four editions.

<sup>587</sup> The Chinese characters printed in smaller size represent the editor's own words. In editing a text of a scripture, an editor rarely amends the original words even if he considers there to be an obvious mistake. Instead, he usually leaves the text unchanged and adds his correction or comment in a smaller size script, so that the reader is able to see both the original text and the editor's work on it. Both Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi follow this rule. In order to show the difference, I put the translation of the editors' words in brackets. Zhu Xi's *Supplement* is an exception, as it is treated as part of the text of *The Great Learning*.

<p>其本亂而末治者否矣。其所厚者薄，而其所薄者厚，未之有也。</p> <p>此謂知本，此謂知之至也。</p> <p>所謂誠其意者，毋自欺也。如惡惡臭，如好好色，此之謂自謙。故君子必慎其獨也。</p> <p>小人閑居爲不善，無所不至，見君子而後厭然，掩其不善，而著其善。人之視己，如見其肺肝然，則何益矣。此謂誠于中，形于外，故君子必慎其獨也。</p> <p>曾子曰：「十目所視，十手所指，其嚴乎！」富潤屋，德潤身，心廣體胖，故君子必誠其意。</p> <p>《詩》雲：「瞻彼泣澳，綠竹猗猗。有斐君子，如切如磋，如琢如磨。瑟兮人閒兮，赫兮喧兮。有斐君子，終不可言宣兮！」「如初如磋」者，道學也。「如琢如磨」者，自修也。「瑟兮人閒兮」者，恂心栗也。「赫兮喧兮」者，威儀也。「有斐君子，終不可言宣兮」者，道盛德至善，民之不能忘也。</p> <p>《詩》雲：「于戲，前王不忘！」君子賢其賢而要親其親，小</p>	<p>其本亂而末治者否矣。其所厚者薄，而其所薄者厚，未之有也。</p> <p>子曰：「聽訟，吾猶人也。必也使無訟乎！」無情者不得盡其辭。大畏民志，此謂知本」。四字衍。</p> <p>此謂知本，此謂知之至也。</p> <p>《康誥》曰：「克明德。」</p> <p>《大甲》曰：「顧諟天之明命。」</p> <p>《帝典》曰：「克明峻德。」皆自明也。</p> <p>湯之《盤銘》曰：「苟日新，日日新，又日新。」</p> <p>《康誥》曰：「作新民。」</p> <p>《詩》曰：「周雖舊邦，其命維新。」是故君子無所不用其極。</p>	<p>其本亂而末治者否矣。其所厚者薄，而其所薄者厚，未之有也。</p> <p>子曰：「聽訟，吾猶人也。必也使無訟乎！」無情者不得盡其辭。大畏民志，此謂知本」。四字衍。</p> <p>此謂知本，此謂知之至也。</p> <p>《康誥》曰：「克明德。」</p> <p>《大甲》曰：「顧諟天之明命。」</p> <p>《帝典》曰：「克明峻德。」皆自明也。</p>	<p>其本亂而末治者否矣。其所厚者薄，而其所薄者厚，未之有也。</p> <p>右經一章，蓋孔子之言，而曾子述之。凡二百五字。</p> <p>其傳十章，則曾子之意而門人記之也。</p> <p>舊本頗有錯簡，今因程子所定，而更考經文，別爲序次如左。</p> <p>凡千五百四十六字。</p> <p>《康誥》曰：「克明德。」</p> <p>《大甲》曰：「顧諟天之明命。」</p> <p>《帝典》曰：「克明峻德。」皆自明也。</p>
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<p>人樂其樂而利其利，此以沒世不忘也。</p> <p>《康誥》曰：「克明德。」</p> <p>《大甲》曰：「顧諟天之明命。」</p> <p>《帝典》曰：「克明峻德。」皆自明也。</p> <p>湯之《盤銘》曰：「苟日新，日日新，又日新。」</p> <p>《康誥》曰：「作新民。」</p> <p>《詩》曰：「周雖舊邦，其命維新。」是故君子無所不用其極。</p> <p>《詩》雲：「邦畿千里，維民所止。」</p> <p>《詩》雲：「緡蠻黃鳥，止于丘隅。」子曰：「于止，知其所止，可以人而不如鳥乎？」</p> <p>《詩》雲：「穆穆文王，于緝熙敬止！」為人君，止于仁；為人臣止于敬；為人子，止于孝；為人父，止于慈；與國人交，止于信。</p> <p>子曰：「聽訟，吾猶人也。必也使無訟乎！」無情者不得盡其辭。大畏民志，此謂知本」。</p> <p>……</p>	<p>《詩》雲：「邦畿千里，維民所止。」</p> <p>《詩》雲：「緡蠻黃鳥，止于丘隅。」子曰：「于止，知其所止，可以人而不如鳥乎？」</p> <p>《詩》雲：「穆穆文王，于緝熙敬止！」為人君，止于仁；為人臣止于敬；為人子，止于孝；為人父，止于慈；與國人交，止于信。</p> <p>古之欲明明德于天下者，先治其國。欲治其國者，先齊其家，欲齊其家者，先修其身。欲修其身者，先正其心。欲正其心者，先誠其意。欲誠其意者，先致其知。致知在格物。物格而後知至，知至而後意誠，意誠而後心正，心正而後身修，身修而後家齊，家齊而後國治，國治而後天下平。</p> <p>自天子以至于庶人，壹是皆以修身為本。其本亂而末治者否矣。其所厚者薄，而其所薄者厚，未之有也。</p> <p>此謂知本，此謂知至也。</p> <p>所謂誠其意者，毋自欺也。如惡惡臭，如好好色，此之謂自謙。故君子必慎其獨也。</p> <p>小人閑居為不善，無所不至，見君子而後</p>	<p>湯之《盤銘》曰：「苟日新，日日新，又日新。」</p> <p>《康誥》曰：「作新民。」</p> <p>《詩》曰：「周雖舊邦，其命維新。」是故君子無所不用其極。</p> <p>《詩》雲：「邦畿千里，維民所止。」</p> <p>《詩》雲：「緡蠻黃鳥，止于丘隅。」子曰：「于止，知其所止，可以人而不如鳥乎？」</p> <p>《詩》雲：「穆穆文王，于緝熙敬止！」為人君，止于仁；為人臣止于敬；為人子，止于孝；為人父，止于慈；與國人交，止于信。</p> <p>所謂誠其意者，毋自欺也。如惡惡臭，如好好色，此之謂自</p>	<p>右传之首章。释明明德。</p> <p>湯之《盤銘》曰：「苟日新，日日新，又日新。」</p> <p>《康誥》曰：「作新民。」</p> <p>《詩》曰：「周雖舊邦，其命維新。」是故君子無所不用其極。</p> <p>右传之二章。释新民。</p> <p>《詩》雲：「邦畿千里，維民所止。」</p> <p>《詩》雲：「緡蠻黃鳥，止于丘隅。」子曰：「于止，知其所止，可以人而不如鳥乎？」</p> <p>《詩》雲：「穆穆文王，于緝熙敬止！」為人君，止于仁；為人臣止于敬；為人子，止于孝；為人父，止于慈；與國人交，止于信。</p>
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	<p>厭然，掩其不善，而著其善。人之視己，如見其肺肝然，則何益矣。此謂誠于中，形于外，故君子必慎其獨也。</p> <p>曾子曰：「十目所視，十手所指，其嚴乎！」富潤屋，德潤身，心廣體胖，故君子必誠其意。</p> <p>……</p> <p>《詩》云：「瞻彼淇澳，綠竹猗猗。有斐君子，如切如磋，如琢如磨。瑟兮人問兮，赫兮喧兮。有斐君子，終不可言宣兮！」「如初如磋」者，道學也。「如琢如磨」者，自修也。「瑟兮人問兮」者，恂心栗也。「赫兮喧兮」者，威儀也。「有斐君子，終不可言宣兮」者，道盛德至善，民之不能忘也。</p> <p>《詩》云：「于戲，前王不忘！」君子賢其賢而要親其親，小人樂其樂而利其利，此以沒世不忘也。</p> <p>子曰：「聽訟，吾猶人也。必也使無訟乎！」無情者不得盡其辭。大畏民志，此謂知本」。</p>	<p>謙。故君子必慎其獨也。</p> <p>小人閑居爲不善，無所不至，見君子而後厭然，掩其不善，而著其善。人之視己，如見其肺肝然，則何益矣。此謂誠于中，形于外，故君子必慎其獨也。</p> <p>曾子曰：「十目所視，十手所指，其嚴乎！」富潤屋，德潤身，心廣體胖，故君子必誠其意。</p> <p>……</p> <p>《詩》云：「瞻彼淇澳，綠竹猗猗。有斐君子，如切如磋，如琢如磨。瑟兮人問兮，赫兮喧兮。有斐君子，終不可言宣兮！」「如初如磋」者，道學也。「如琢如磨」者，自修也。「瑟兮人問兮」者，恂心栗也。「赫兮喧兮」者，威儀也。「有斐君子，終不可言宣兮」者，道盛德至善，民之不能忘也。</p> <p>《詩》云：「于戲，前王不忘！」君子賢其賢而要親其親，小人樂其樂而利其利，此以沒世不忘也。</p>	<p>《詩》云：「瞻彼淇澳，綠竹猗猗。有斐君子，如切如磋，如琢如磨。瑟兮人問兮，赫兮喧兮。有斐君子，終不可言宣兮！」「如初如磋」者，道學也。「如琢如磨」者，自修也。「瑟兮人問兮」者，恂心栗也。「赫兮喧兮」者，威儀也。「有斐君子，終不可言宣兮」者，道盛德至善，民之不能忘也。</p> <p>《詩》云：「于戲，前王不忘！」君子賢其賢而要親其親，小人樂其樂而利其利，此以沒世不忘也。</p> <p>右傳之三章。釋止于至善。</p> <p>子曰：「聽訟，吾猶人也。必也使無訟乎！」無情者不得盡其辭。大畏民志，此謂知本」。</p> <p>右傳之四章。釋本末。</p> <p>此謂知本，程子曰：衍文也。</p>
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			<p>此謂知之至也。此句之上別有關文，此特其結語耳。</p> <p>右傳之五章，蓋釋格物、致知之義，而今亡矣。此章舊本通下章，誤在經文之下。間嘗取程子之意以補之，曰：“所謂致知在格物者，言欲致吾之知，在即物而窮其理也。蓋人心之靈莫不有知，而天下之物莫不有理，惟于理有未窮，故其知有不盡也。是以大學始教，必使學者即凡天下之物，莫不因其已知之理而益窮之，以求至乎其極。至于用力之久，而壹旦豁然貫通焉，則衆物之表裏精粗無不到，而吾心之全體大用無不明矣。此謂物格，此謂知之至也。”</p> <p>所謂誠其意者，毋自欺也。如惡惡臭，如好好色，此之謂自謙。故君子必慎其獨也。</p> <p>小人閑居爲不善，無所不至，見君子而後厭然，掩其不善，而著其善。人之視己，如見其肺肝然，則何益矣。此謂誠于中，形于外，故君子必慎其獨也。</p> <p>曾子曰：「十目所視，十手所指，其嚴乎！」富潤屋，德潤身，心廣體胖，故君子必誠其意。</p> <p>右傳之六章。釋誠意。</p>
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**English translations:**

Zheng Xuan	Cheng Hao	Cheng Yi	Zhu Xi
What the great learning teaches, is to resume the enlightening virtue; to love the people; and to repose in the ultimate goodness. <sup>588</sup>	What the great learning teaches, is to resume the enlightening virtue; to love the people; and to repose in the ultimate goodness.	What the great learning teaches, is to resume the enlightening virtue; to love ('love' should be 'renew') the people; and to repose in the ultimate goodness.	What the great learning teaches, is to resume the enlightening virtue; to love the people; and to repose in the ultimate goodness. (Master Cheng says: 'love' should be 'renew'.)
The point where to rest being known, the object of pursuit is then determined; and, that being determined, a calm unperturbedness may be attained to. To that calmness there will succeed a tranquil repose. In that repose there may be careful	The point where to rest being known, the object of pursuit is then determined; and, that being determined, a calm unperturbedness may be attained to. To that calmness there will succeed a tranquil repose. In that repose there may be careful	The point where to rest being known, the object of pursuit is then determined; and, that being determined, a calm unperturbedness may be attained to. To that calmness there will succeed a tranquil repose. In that repose there may be careful	The point where to rest being known, the object of pursuit is then determined; and, that being determined, a calm unperturbedness may be attained to. To that calmness there will succeed a tranquil repose. In that repose there may be careful

<sup>588</sup> Mainly based on James Legg's translation, slightly altered.

deliberation, and that deliberation will be followed by the attainment of the desired end.	deliberation, and that deliberation will be followed by the attainment of the desired end.	deliberation, and that deliberation will be followed by the attainment of the desired end.	deliberation, and that deliberation will be followed by the attainment of the desired end.
Things have their root and their branches. Affairs have their end and their beginning. To know what is first and what is last will lead near to what is taught in the Great Learning.	Things have their root and their branches. Affairs have their end and their beginning. To know what is first and what is last will lead near to what is taught in the Great Learning.	Things have their root and their branches. Affairs have their end and their beginning. To know what is first and what is last will lead near to what is taught in the Great Learning.	Things have their root and their branches. Affairs have their end and their beginning. To know what is first and what is last will lead near to what is taught in the Great Learning.
The ancients who wished to illustrate enlightening virtue throughout the kingdom, first ordered well their own states. Wishing to order well their states, they first regulated their families. Wishing to regulate their families, they first cultivated their		The ancients who wished to illustrate enlightening virtue throughout the kingdom, first ordered well their own states. Wishing to order well their states, they first regulated their families. Wishing to regulate their families, they first cultivated their	The ancients who wished to illustrate enlightening virtue throughout the kingdom, first ordered well their own states. Wishing to order well their states, they first regulated their families. Wishing to regulate their families, they first cultivated their

<p>persons. Wishing to cultivate their persons, they first rectified their minds. Wishing to rectify their minds, they first sought to be sincere in their wills. Wishing to be sincere in their wills, they first extended to the utmost their knowledge. Such extension of knowledge lay in the investigation of things.</p> <p>Things being investigated, knowledge became complete. Their knowledge being complete, their wills were sincere. Their wills being sincere, their minds were then rectified. Their minds being rectified, their persons were</p>		<p>persons. Wishing to cultivate their persons, they first rectified their minds. Wishing to rectify their minds, they first sought to be sincere in their wills. Wishing to be sincere in their wills, they first extended to the utmost their knowledge. Such extension of knowledge lay in the investigation of things.</p> <p>Things being investigated, knowledge became complete. Their knowledge being complete, their wills were sincere. Their wills being sincere, their minds were then rectified. Their minds being rectified, their persons were</p>	<p>persons. Wishing to cultivate their persons, they first rectified their minds. Wishing to rectify their minds, they first sought to be sincere in their wills. Wishing to be sincere in their wills, they first extended to the utmost their knowledge. Such extension of knowledge lay in the investigation of things.</p> <p>Things being investigated, knowledge became complete. Their knowledge being complete, their wills were sincere. Their wills being sincere, their minds were then rectified. Their minds being rectified, their persons were</p>
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<p>cultivated. Their persons being cultivated, their families were regulated. Their families being regulated, their states were rightly governed. Their states being rightly governed, the whole kingdom was made tranquil and happy.</p> <p>From the Son of Heaven down to the mass of the people, all must consider the cultivation of the person the root of everything besides.</p> <p>It cannot be, when the root is neglected, that what should spring from it will be well ordered. It never has been the case that what was of great importance</p>		<p>cultivated. Their persons being cultivated, their families were regulated. Their families being regulated, their states were rightly governed. Their states being rightly governed, the whole kingdom was made tranquil and happy.</p> <p>From the Son of Heaven down to the mass of the people, all must consider the cultivation of the person the root of everything besides.</p> <p>It cannot be, when the root is neglected, that what should spring from it will be well ordered. It never has been the case that what was of great importance</p>	<p>cultivated. Their persons being cultivated, their families were regulated. Their families being regulated, their states were rightly governed. Their states being rightly governed, the whole kingdom was made tranquil and happy.</p> <p>From the Son of Heaven down to the mass of the people, all must consider the cultivation of the person the root of everything besides.</p> <p>It cannot be, when the root is neglected, that what should spring from it will be well ordered. It never has been the case that what was of great importance</p>
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<p>has been slightly cared for, and, at the same time, that what was of slight importance has been greatly cared for.</p>		<p>has been slightly cared for, and, at the same time, that what was of slight importance has been greatly cared for.</p>	<p>has been slightly cared for, and, at the same time, that what was of slight importance has been greatly cared for.</p>
		<p>The Master said, “In hearing litigations, I am like any other body. What is necessary is to cause the people to have no litigations.” So, those who are devoid of principle find it impossible to carry out their speeches, and a great awe would be struck into men’s minds;-this is called knowing the root. These four words are superfluous.</p>	<p>Above is the text of Scripture which contains the words of Confucius being scribed by Zengzi. (two hundred and five words altogether). The text of Commentary includes ten chapters, which retains the ideas of Zengzi being recorded by the disciples of him.</p>
<p>This is called knowing the root. This is called</p>		<p>This is called knowing the root. This is called</p>	<p>The old edition [Zheng Xuan’s edition] is faulty in many ways. Based on Cheng’s version and also referring to the text of the</p>

<p>knowing to the utmost.</p> <p>What is meant by “making the wills sincere.” is the allowing no self-deception, as when we hate a bad smell, and as when we love what is beautiful. This is called self-enjoyment. Therefore, the superior man must be watchful over himself when he is alone.</p> <p>There is no evil to which the mean man, dwelling retired, will not proceed, but when he sees a superior man, he instantly tries to disguise himself, concealing his evil, and displaying what is good. The other</p>		<p>knowing to the utmost.</p>	<p>Scripture I am now reorganising it as follows. There are one thousand five hundred and forty six words altogether.</p>
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<p> beholds him, as if  he saw his heart  and reins;-of what  use is his disguise?  This is an instance  of the saying  —”What truly is  within will be  manifested  without.”  Therefore, the  gentle man must  be watchful over  himself when he is  alone. </p> <p> The disciple Tsang  said, “What ten  eyes behold, what  ten hands point to,  is to be regarded  with reverence!”  Riches adorn a  house, and virtue  adorns the person.  The mind is  expanded, and the  body is at ease.  Therefore, the  gentle man must  make his will  sincere. </p>			
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<p>In the Book of Poetry, it is said, “Look at that winding course of the Ch’i, with the green bamboos so luxuriant! Here is our elegant and accomplished prince! As we cut and then file; as we chisel and then grind: so has he cultivated himself. How grave is he and dignified! How majestic and distinguished! Our elegant and accomplished prince never can be forgotten.” That expression-”As we cut and then file,” the work of learning. “As we chisel and then grind,” indicates that of self-culture. “How grave is he and dignified!” indicates the feeling of cautious</p>			
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<p>reverence. “How commanding and distinguished! indicates an awe-inspiring deportment. “Our elegant and accomplished prince never can be forgotten,” indicates how, when virtue is complete and excellence extreme, the people cannot forget them.</p> <p>In the Book of Poetry, it is said, “Ah! the former kings are not forgotten.” Future princes deem worthy what they deemed worthy, and love what they loved. The common people delight in what delighted them, and are benefited by their beneficial</p>			
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<p>arrangements. It is on this account that the former kings, after they have quitted the world, are not forgotten.</p> <p>In the Announcement to K'ang, it is said, "He was able to make his virtue illustrious."</p> <p>In the Tai Chia, it is said, "He contemplated and studied the illustrious decrees of Heaven."</p> <p>In the Canon of the emperor (Yao), it is said, "He was able to make illustrious his lofty virtue." All these mean to illustrate self-illumination.</p>	<p>In the Announcement to K'ang, it is said, "He was able to make his virtue illustrious."</p> <p>In the Tai Chia, it is said, "He contemplated and studied the illustrious decrees of Heaven."</p> <p>In the Canon of the emperor (Yao), it is said, "He was able to make illustrious his lofty virtue." All these mean to illustrate self-illumination.</p>	<p>In the Announcement to K'ang, it is said, "He was able to make his virtue illustrious."</p> <p>In the Tai Chia, it is said, "He contemplated and studied the illustrious decrees of Heaven."</p> <p>In the Canon of the emperor (Yao), it is said, "He was able to make illustrious his lofty virtue." All these mean to illustrate self-illumination.</p>	<p>In the Announcement to K'ang, it is said, "He was able to make his virtue illustrious."</p> <p>In the Tai Chia, it is said, "He contemplated and studied the illustrious decrees of Heaven."</p> <p>In the Canon of the emperor (Yao), it is said, "He was able to make illustrious his lofty virtue." All these mean to illustrate self-illumination.</p> <p>Above is the first chapter of the Commentary which explains the</p>
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			meaning of resuming the enlightening virtue.
On the bathing tub of T'ang, the following words were engraved: "If you can one day renovate yourself, do so from day to day. Yea, let there be daily renovation"	On the bathing tub of T'ang, the following words were engraved: "If you can one day renovate yourself, do so from day to day. Yea, let there be daily renovation"	On the bathing tub of T'ang, the following words were engraved: "If you can one day renovate yourself, do so from day to day. Yea, let there be daily renovation"	On the bathing tub of T'ang, the following words were engraved: "If you can one day renovate yourself, do so from day to day. Yea, let there be daily renovation"
In the Announcement to K'ang, it is said, "To stir up the new people."	In the Announcement to K'ang, it is said, "To stir up the new people."	In the Announcement to K'ang, it is said, "To stir up the new people."	In the Announcement to K'ang, it is said, "To stir up the new people."
In the Book of Poetry, it is said, "Although Chou was an ancient state the ordinance which lighted on it was new."	In the Book of Poetry, it is said, "Although Chau was an ancient state the ordinance which lighted on it was new."	In the Book of Poetry, it is said, "Although Chou was an ancient state the ordinance which lighted on it was new."	In the Book of Poetry, it is said, "Although Chou was an ancient state the ordinance which lighted on it was new."
Therefore, the superior man in everything uses his utmost endeavours.	Therefore, the superior man in everything uses his utmost endeavours.	Therefore, the superior man in everything uses his utmost endeavours.	Therefore, the superior man in everything uses his utmost endeavours.

utmost endeavours.			utmost endeavours.
			Above is the second chapter of the Commentary which explains the meaning of 'renewing the people'.
In the Book of Poetry, it is said, "The royal domain of a thousand li is where the people rest."	In the Book of Poetry, it is said, "The royal domain of a thousand li is where the people rest."	In the Book of Poetry, it is said, "The royal domain of a thousand li is where the people rest."	In the Book of Poetry, it is said, "The royal domain of a thousand li is where the people rest."
In the Book of Poetry, it is said, "The twittering yellow bird rests on a corner of the mound." The Master said, "When it rests, it knows where to rest. Is it possible that a man should not be equal to this bird?"	In the Book of Poetry, it is said, "The twittering yellow bird rests on a corner of the mound." The Master said, "When it rests, it knows where to rest. Is it possible that a man should not be equal to this bird?"	In the Book of Poetry, it is said, "The twittering yellow bird rests on a corner of the mound." The Master said, "When it rests, it knows where to rest. Is it possible that a man should not be equal to this bird?"	In the Book of Poetry, it is said, "The twittering yellow bird rests on a corner of the mound." The Master said, "When it rests, it knows where to rest. Is it possible that a man should not be equal to this bird?"
	In the Book of Poetry, it is said, "Profound was King Wen. With how bright and unceasing a feeling	In the Book of Poetry, it is said, "Profound was King Wen. With	

<p>In the Book of Poetry, it is said, “Profound was King Wen. With how bright and unceasing a feeling of reverence did he regard his resting places!” As a sovereign, he rested in benevolence. As a minister, he rested in reverence. As a son, he rested in filial piety. As a father, he rested in kindness. In communication with his subjects, he rested in good faith.</p> <p>The Master said, “In hearing litigations, I am like any other body. What is necessary is to cause the people to have no litigations.” So, those who are</p>	<p>of reverence did he regard his resting places!” As a sovereign, he rested in benevolence. As a minister, he rested in reverence. As a son, he rested in filial piety. As a father, he rested in kindness. In communication with his subjects, he rested in good faith.</p> <p>The ancients who wished to illustrate enlightening virtue throughout the kingdom, first ordered well their own states. Wishing to order well their states, they first regulated their families. Wishing to regulate their families, they first cultivated their persons. Wishing</p>	<p>how bright and unceasing a feeling of reverence did he regard his resting places!” As a sovereign, he rested in benevolence. As a minister, he rested in reverence. As a son, he rested in filial piety. As a father, he rested in kindness. In communication with his subjects, he rested in good faith.</p>	<p>In the Book of Poetry, it is said, “Profound was King Wen. With how bright and unceasing a feeling of reverence did he regard his resting places!” As a sovereign, he rested in benevolence. As a minister, he rested in reverence. As a son, he rested in filial piety. As a father, he rested in kindness. In communication with his subjects, he rested in good faith.</p>
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<p>devoid of principle find it impossible to carry out their speeches, and a great awe would be struck into men's minds;-this is called knowing the root.</p>	<p>to cultivate their persons, they first rectified their minds. Wishing to rectify their minds, they first sought to be sincere in their wills. Wishing to be sincere in their wills, they first extended to the utmost their knowledge. Such extension of knowledge lay in the investigation of things. Things being investigated, knowledge became complete. Their knowledge being complete, their wills were sincere. Their wills being sincere, their minds were then rectified. Their minds being rectified, their persons were cultivated. Their persons being</p>		
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	<p>cultivated, their families were regulated. Their families being regulated, their states were rightly governed. Their states being rightly governed, the whole kingdom was made tranquil and happy.</p> <p>From the Son of Heaven down to the mass of the people, all must consider the cultivation of the person the root of everything besides.</p> <p>It cannot be, when the root is neglected, that what should spring from it will be well ordered. It never has been the case that what was of great importance has been slightly cared for, and, at</p>		
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	<p>the same time, that what was of slight importance has been greatly cared for.</p> <p>This is called knowing the root.</p> <p>This is called knowing to the utmost.</p> <p>What is meant by “making the wills sincere.” is the allowing no self-deception, as when we hate a bad smell, and as when we love what is beautiful. This is called self-enjoyment. Therefore, the gentle man must be watchful over himself when he is alone.</p> <p>There is no evil to which the mean man, dwelling retired, will not</p>	<p>What is meant by “making the thoughts sincere.” is the allowing no self-deception, as when we hate a bad smell, and as when we love what is beautiful. This is called self-enjoyment. Therefore, the gentle man must be watchful over himself when he is alone.</p> <p>There is no evil to which the mean man, dwelling retired, will not</p>	
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	<p>proceed, but when he sees a gentle man, he instantly tries to disguise himself, concealing his evil, and displaying what is good. The other beholds him, as if he saw his heart and reins;-of what use is his disguise? This is an instance of the saying —"What truly is within will be manifested without."</p> <p>Therefore, the gentle man must be watchful over himself when he is alone.</p> <p>The disciple Tseng said, "What ten eyes behold, what ten hands point to, is to be regarded with reverence!"</p> <p>Riches adorn a house, and virtue</p>	<p>proceed, but when he sees a gentle man, he instantly tries to disguise himself, concealing his evil, and displaying what is good. The other beholds him, as if he saw his heart and reins;-of what use is his disguise? This is an instance of the saying —"What truly is within will be manifested without."</p> <p>Therefore, the gentle man must be watchful over himself when he is alone.</p> <p>The disciple Tseng said, "What ten eyes behold, what ten hands point to, is to be regarded with reverence!"</p> <p>Riches adorn a house, and virtue</p>	
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	<p>adorns the person. The mind is expanded, and the body is at ease. Therefore, the gentleman must make his thoughts sincere.</p> <p>.....</p> <p>[The following quotes fall within the section of governing the state and pacifying the world]</p> <p>In the Book of Poetry, it is said, “Look at that winding course of the Ch’i, with the green bamboos so luxuriant! Here is our elegant and accomplished prince! As we cut and then file; as we chisel and then grind: so has he cultivated himself. How grave is he and dignified! How majestic and</p>	<p>adorns the person. The mind is expanded, and the body is at ease. Therefore, the gentleman must make his thoughts sincere.</p> <p>.....</p> <p>[The following quotes fall within the section of governing the state and pacifying the world]</p> <p>In the Book of Poetry, it is said, “Look at that winding course of the Ch’i, with the green bamboos so luxuriant! Here is our elegant and accomplished prince! As we cut and then file; as we chisel and then grind: so has he cultivated himself. How grave is he and dignified! How majestic and</p>	<p>In the Book of Poetry, it is said, “Look at that winding course of the Ch’i, with the green bamboos so luxuriant! Here is our elegant and accomplished prince! As we cut and then file; as we chisel and then grind: so has he cultivated himself.</p>
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	<p>distinguished! Our elegant and accomplished prince never can be forgotten.” That expression-”As we cut and then file,” the work of learning. “As we chisel and then grind,” indicates that of self-culture. “How grave is he and dignified!” indicates the feeling of cautious reverence. “How commanding and distinguished! indicates an awe-inspiring deportment. “Our elegant and accomplished prince never can be forgotten,” indicates how, when virtue is complete and excellence extreme, the people cannot forget them.</p>	<p>distinguished! Our elegant and accomplished prince never can be forgotten.” That expression-”As we cut and then file,” the work of learning. “As we chisel and then grind,” indicates that of self-culture. “How grave is he and dignified!” indicates the feeling of cautious reverence. “How commanding and distinguished! indicates an awe-inspiring deportment. “Our elegant and accomplished prince never can be forgotten,” indicates how, when virtue is complete and excellence extreme, the people cannot forget them.</p>	<p>How grave is he and dignified! How majestic and distinguished! Our elegant and accomplished prince never can be forgotten.” That expression-”As we cut and then file,” the work of learning. “As we chisel and then grind,” indicates that of self-culture. “How grave is he and dignified!” indicates the feeling of cautious reverence. “How commanding and distinguished! indicates an awe-inspiring deportment. “Our elegant and accomplished prince never can be forgotten,” indicates how, when virtue is complete and excellence</p>
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	<p>In the Book of Poetry, it is said, “Ah! the former kings are not forgotten.” Future princes deem worthy what they deemed worthy, and love what they loved. The common people delight in what delighted them, and are benefited by their beneficial arrangements. It is on this account that the former kings, after they have quitted the world, are not forgotten.</p>	<p>In the Book of Poetry, it is said, “Ah! the former kings are not forgotten.” Future princes deem worthy what they deemed worthy, and love what they loved. The common people delight in what delighted them, and are benefited by their beneficial arrangements. It is on this account that the former kings, after they have quitted the world, are not forgotten.</p>	<p>extreme, the people cannot forget them.</p> <p>In the Book of Poetry, it is said, “Ah! the former kings are not forgotten.” Future princes deem worthy what they deemed worthy, and love what they loved. The common people delight in what delighted them, and are benefited by their beneficial arrangements. It is on this account that the former kings, after they have quitted the world, are not forgotten.</p> <p>Above is the third chapter of the Commentary which explains the meaning of ‘reposing in the</p>
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	<p>The Master said,          “In hearing          litigations, I am          like any other          body. What is          necessary is to          cause the people to          have no          litigations.” So,          those who are          devoid of principle          find it impossible          to carry out their          speeches, and a          great awe would          be struck into          men’s minds;-this          is called knowing          the root.          .....</p>		<p>ultimate          goodness’.</p> <p>The Master said,          “In hearing          litigations, I am          like any other          body. What is          necessary is to          cause the people to          have no          litigations.” So,          those who are          devoid of principle          find it impossible          to carry out their          speeches, and a          great awe would          be struck into          men’s minds;-this          is called knowing          the root.          .....</p> <p>Above is the          fourth chapter of          the Commentary          which explains the          meaning of ‘root          and branches.</p> <p>This is called          knowing the root.</p>
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			<p>Master Cheng says this is superfluous. This is called knowing to the utmost. There should be some text preceded to this which has been omitted, this is the concluding sentence of it. Above is the fifth section of the Commentary which explains the meaning of ‘the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge. However, this section was omitted. In the old edition both of this chapter and the following one are mistakenly located after the text of the Scripture. So I provide a Supplement to it according to the teaching of master</p>
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			<p>Cheng, which goes as “The Words, ‘the extension of knowledge lies in the investigation of things,’ mean that we should apply ourselves to things so as to gain an exhaustive knowledge of their Principles. This is because there is no human intelligence utterly devoid of knowledge, and no single thing in the world without Principle. So long as the investigation of these Principles is not exhaustive, the knowledge of them will by no means be comprehensive. That is why The Great Learning primarily commands all the students to seek the knowledge of the Principles by</p>
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			<p> means of  investigating all  things in the  world, namely to  proceed from the  Principles already  known to him, to a  further exhaustive  knowledge and  finally attaining  the ultimate. After  having exerted  such an effort for a  long time,  suddenly a  breakthrough will  be made and the  complete  understanding will  dawn on one.  Thereby brings  about a thorough  comprehension of  all the multitude of  things, be it  external or  internal, fine or  coarse; and the  whole entity and  the great function  of one's own mind  will be fully  realised, which, [as </p>
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			<p>a whole] signifies the state after ‘things have been investigated’ and ‘the knowledge has been extended to the utmost.’”</p> <p>589</p> <p>What is meant by “making the wills sincere.” is the allowing no self-deception, as when we hate a bad smell, and as when we love what is beautiful. This is called self-enjoyment. Therefore, the gentle man must be watchful over himself when he is alone.</p> <p>There is no evil to which the mean man, dwelling</p>
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<sup>589</sup> This section is based on Derk Bodde’s translation; alterations are made accordingly. For the details of Derk Bodde’s translation, see Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, trans. by Derk Bodde, (Princeton, 1983), 2, 561.

			<p>retired, will not proceed, but when he sees a gentle man, he instantly tries to disguise himself, concealing his evil, and displaying what is good. The other beholds him, as if he saw his heart and reins;-of what use is his disguise? This is an instance of the saying —"What truly is within will be manifested without." Therefore, the gentle man must be watchful over himself when he is alone.</p> <p>The disciple Tseng said, "What ten eyes behold, what ten hands point to, is to be regarded with reverence!" Riches adorn a</p>
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			<p>house, and virtue adorns the person. The mind is expanded, and the body is at ease. Therefore, the gentle man must make his wills sincere.</p> <p><u>Above is the sixth chapter of the Commentary which explains the meaning of 'keeping the will sincere'.</u></p> <p>.....</p>
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## Appendix 2

### Chinese-English Glossary

- 愛 *ai*: love  
本 *ben*: root or substantial, essential,  
博 *bo*: erudition  
誠 *cheng*: sincerity  
持敬 *chi-jing*: to hold fast on conscientiousness  
粗 *cu*: crude or crudity  
禪宗 *chan-zong*: the school of Zen Buddhism or simply Zen  
大學 *da-xue*: the great learning  
道 *dao*: Way  
道統 *dao tong*: the transmission of the Way  
德 *de*: virtue or quality  
德性之知 *de-xing-zhi-zhi*: innate knowledge  
多 *duo*: many or multiplicity  
涵養 *han-yang*: nourishing the self-nature  
格物 *ge-wu*: the investigation of things  
觀理 *guan-li*: to observe the Principle or principles  
工夫 *gong-fu*: the art of personal cultivation  
貫通 *guan-tong*: thorough comprehension  
己 *ji*: self  
積累 *ji-lei*: accumulation  
集註 *ji-zhu*: collective commentary  
教 *jiao*: teaching or doctrine  
進學 *jin-xue*: to advance learning  
敬 *jing*: conscientiousness  
靜 *jing*: quiet or quietness  
經 *jing*: scripture  
精 *jing*: fine  
靜坐 *jing-zuo*: quiet sitting or meditation  
經學 *jing-xue*: scriptural learning  
覺 *jue*: awareness  
空 *kong*: empty or void  
理學 *li-xue*: the school of Principle  
理 *Li*: Principle

禮 *li*: ritual  
 理一分殊 *li-yi-fen-shu*: one Principle with many manifestations  
 良知 *liang-zhi*: innate moral awareness  
 論 *lun*: treatise  
 命 *ming*: mandate  
 明德 *ming-de*: enlightening virtue  
 末 *mo*: the trivial or unimportant  
 內 *nei*: internal  
 平天下 *ping-tian-xia*: to pacify the world  
 氣 *qi*: the cosmic matter or material force  
 齊家 *qi-jia*: to regulate family  
 氣質之性 *qi-zhi-zhi-xing*: man's physio-psychical nature  
 情 *qing*: sentiment  
 窮理 *qiong-li*: to probe the Principle  
 仁 *ren*: humanity or benevolence  
 身 *shen*: body  
 神 *shen*: godly beings or miraculous  
 聖 *sheng*: sage  
 聖賢 *sheng-xian*: the sages and worthies  
 實 *shi*: actuality or reality  
 士 *shi*: scholar-official  
 疏 *shu*: further explanation of a scriptural commentary  
 四書 *si-shu*: The Four Books- *The Great Learning* (*Da Xue* 大學), *The Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語), *The Book of Mencius* (*Mengzi* 孟子), and *The Doctrine of the Mean* (*Zhong Yong* 中庸),  
 太極 *tai-ji*: the great ultimate  
 體 *ti*: substance or entity  
 體用 *ti-yong*: substance and function  
 天 *tian*: heaven  
 天地之性 *tian-di-zhi-xing*: man's heavenly nature  
 天命 *tian-ming*: the mandate of heaven  
 同 *tong*: same  
 外 *wai*: external  
 聞見之知 *wen-jian-zhi-zhi*: knowledge acquired through senses  
 無 *wu*: nothing or nothingness  
 無極 *wu-ji*: the non-ultimate  
 五經 *wu-jing*: *The Five Classics*-*The Book of Poetry* (*Shi Jing* 詩經), *The Book of Documents* (*Shang Shu* 尚書), *The Book of Rites* (*Li Ji* 禮記), *The Book of Changes* (*Yi Jing* 易經), and *The Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chun Qiu* 春秋)

五行 *wu-xing*: the five elements  
 物 *wu*: things  
 心 *xin*: mind, heart or mind-heart  
 信 *xin*: trust or faith  
 新民 *xin-min*: renewing people  
 心學 *xin-xue*: the school of mind  
 性 *xing*: nature  
 行 *xing*: action  
 修身 *xiu-sheng*: personal cultivation  
 孝 *xiao*: filial piety  
 小學 *xiao-xue*: the elementary learning  
 形而上 *xing-er-shang*: what is above the form or metaphysical  
 形而下 *xing-er-xia*: what is under the form or physical  
 虛 *xu*: void  
 虛無 *xu-wu*: voidances and nothingness  
 虛空 *xu-kong*: empty, void sphere  
 學 *xue*: to learn or learning  
 一 *yi*: one or oneness  
 異 *yi*: difference or different  
 意 *yi*: meaning or implication  
 義 *yi*: righteousness  
 易 *yi*: easy or change, usually referring to *The Book of Changes*  
 易簡 *yi-jian*: easy and simple  
 意根 *yi-gen*: the root of will  
 陰陽 *yin-yang*: the negative and positive  
 庸 *yong*: common or commonality  
 用 *yong*: function  
 有 *you*: something in opposite to nothing  
 有無 *you-wu*: something and nothing  
 約 *yue*: simple or simplicity  
 章句 *zhang-ju*: a genre of commentary focusing on the syntactic and semantic analysis of chapters, sections, sentences and phrases of an ancient text  
 知 *zhi*: knowledge or knowing  
 智 *zhi*: wisdom  
 治國 *zhi-guo*: to govern the state  
 至善 *zhi-shan*: the ultimate goodness  
 致知 *zhi-zhi*: the extension of knowledge  
 知至 *zhi-zhi*: to know to the utmost  
 中 *zhong*: middle or balance



中和 *zhong-he*: the state of balance and harmony

中庸 *zhong-yong*: the mean usually referring to *The Doctrine of the Mean*

註 *zhu*: commentary

傳 *zhuan*: commentary embedded in a scripture

子學 *zi-xue*: the thoughts of the pre-Qin masters in contrast to the scriptural learning  
flourished in the Han Dynasty

## Appendix 3

### Da Xue Huo Wen 大學或問 Questions and Answers Concerning The Great Learning (Q&A Nos. 1—51)

**Q1.** 或問、大學之道、吾子以爲大人之學、何也。

**A1.** 曰、此對小子之學言之也。

Question: The way of the great learning has been regarded as the education system for the adults, why?

Answer: It is in contrast to the kind of learning in purpose of educating the youngsters.

**Q2.** 曰、敢問、其爲小子之學、何也。

**A2.** 曰、愚於序文已畧陳之、而古法之宜於今者亦既輯而爲書矣。學者不可以不之考也。

Question: May I ask for what reasons it is called the learning of the youngsters?

Answer: I have given a brief explanation in my foreword to the book, and the ancient way of education that is still applicable to the current situation has been edited into a book, to which a scholar should under no circumstance fail to refer.

**Q3.** 曰、吾聞、君子務其遠者大者、小人務其近者小者。今子方將語人以大學之道、而又欲其考乎小學之書、何也。

**A3.** 曰、學之大小、固有不同。然其爲道、則一而已。是以方其幼也、不習之於小學、則無以收其放心、養其德性、而爲大學之基本。及其長也、不進之於大學、則無以察其義理、措諸事業、而收小學之成功。是則學之大小所以不同、特以小長所習之異宜、而有高下淺深先後緩急之殊、非若古今之辨、義利之分、判然、如薰蕕冰炭之相反而不可以相入也。今使幼學之士、必先有以自盡乎洒掃應對進退之間、禮樂射御書數之習、俟其既長、而後進乎明德新民以止於至善。是乃次第之當然、又何爲而不可哉。

Question: I have overheard that a gentleman aims at what is far and great, whereas a mean person focuses on what is near and small. Now you are going to tell us something about the way of the great learning, yet you recommend us to study the books of elementary learning, why?

Answer: It goes without saying that some differences are to be seen between the great and the elementary learning. Nevertheless, the two different systems of learning aim to

pursue the same Way, in that sense, they are united as one. That is the reason why one should embark on the elementary learning in childhood, doing otherwise at this age will lead to a failure in self-concentration and moral cultivation, while moral cultivation serves as the very foundation upon which the great learning is to be built. For one who has come of age, further education in the system of the great learning is necessary, otherwise, one is bound to fail in acquiring the ability either to perceive the principles or achieve the social accomplishments, hence stands little chance to harvest the fruit of the elementary education.

Therefore, it is the various curriculum practised by a child and a grown-up that accounts for the difference between the two forms of learning, thus the distinction made between them should be regarded as differences in terms of the depth of the content and the sequence of practice, namely, one is higher and the other lower, one is relatively profound and the other superficial, one is more urgent than the other, and one is prior to the other. It is not a huge contrast as what distinguishes the past from the present or the righteous from the lucrative, nor is it so incompatible as water and fire. Suppose we let the youngsters start with sweeping the floor and responding to questions, practising the ritual, music, archery, driving a chariot, literacy and mathematics, when they grow up, let them step into the learning that aims at resuming the enlightening virtue, rectifying the citizens and attaining the ultimate goodness. That is just following the natural order, what is wrong with it then?

**Q4.** 曰、幼學之士、以子之言而得循序漸進以免於躐等陵節之病、則誠幸矣。若其年之既長而不及乎此者、欲反從事於小學、則恐其不免於扞格不勝、勤苦難成之患。欲直從事於大學、則又恐其失序無本而不能以自達也。則如之何。

**A4.** 曰、是其歲月之已逝者、則固不可得而復追矣。若其工夫之次第條目、則豈遂不可得而復補耶。蓋吾聞之。敬之一字、聖學所以成始而成終者也。爲小學者不由乎此、固無以涵養本源、而謹夫洒掃應對進退之節、與夫六藝之教。爲大學者不由乎此、亦無以開發聰明、進德脩業、而致夫明德新民之功也。是以程子發明格物之道、而必以是爲說焉。不幸過時而後學者、誠能用力於此以進乎大而不害兼補乎其小、則其所以進者、將不患於無本而不能以自達矣。其或摧頽已甚而不足以有所兼、則其所以固其肌膚之會、筋骸之束、而養其良知良能之本者、亦可以得之於此、而不患其失之於前也。顧以七年之病而求三年之艾、非百倍其功不足以致之。若徒歸咎於既往、而所以

補之於後者又不能以自力、則吾見其扞格勤苦日有甚焉、而身心顛倒、眩瞶迷惑、終無以爲致知力行之地矣。況欲有以及乎天下國家也哉。

Question: For the youngsters, it will be very fortunate if they could follow the steps as you just listed and gradually advance in learning, since in so doing they will be free from the mistakes in the sequence and manner of learning. But for those who have come of age yet missed the chance of practising the elementary learning, if you let them start from the scratch, I am afraid they will not be able to take on such a huge project and unavoidably end up with vain attempt. Should they embark upon the great learning straightaway, they would possibly be jeopardising the proper sequence of learning and consequently fail in self-fulfilment. What are they going to do then?

Answer: As for the time that had passed away, surely there is no way to get it back. Nevertheless, there are plenty can be done to make up for the contents of education that one had been neglected in the past so far as I am concerned.

It is said that the word ‘conscientiousness’ (jing-敬) constitutes the very line that should be closely followed throughout the whole process of the divine learning. One who has deviated from it in the elementary learning will be prone to incompetence in cultivating the original source of morality, thus fail to accomplish the proprieties in conducting minor activities such as sweeping floor, answering questions and responding to present situations, and will hardly master the six arts (rites, music, archery, driving a chariot, literacy and mathematics) in classical education. Likewise, one who has deviated from it in the great learning will hardly fulfil one’s intellectual potential, nor will it be likely for him to develop his virtue and improve his study, therefore stand little chance to achieve the goal of resuming the enlightening virtue and renewing the people.

For those reasons, Master Cheng Yi readdresses the methodology of investigation things and in particular gives elucidation upon that issue. For those who have unfortunately missed the chance of receiving the elementary education in their early days, there is still possibility to make a progress in the great learning and in the meantime make up for the missed lessons, if they really work hard on it in this way. If that is the case, then their proceedings in Confucian learning will be well established and they will not be far from self-fulfilment. As for those who are physically too frail to cope with both of the great and elementary learning, it is still possible for them to gain benefit from this approach in the sense that the root of innate knowledge will be

nurtured, and the innate power that sustains one's physical strength be nourished alike. In a way, they will be free from the shortcomings they used to have.

Like one who starts to look for the remedy after having been ill for a long time, the chance of success will be very slim unless one hundred times more efforts are put into it. If one keeps blaming what had happened in the past and being obsessed with the previous mistakes, and fails to catch up by one's own endeavours, I can see how in vain his struggle will be, and how perplexed a state of mind he will be in, surely he will get nowhere in terms of acquiring knowledge and of putting that knowledge into practice. Let alone extend it further to the state as well as the whole wide world.

**Q5.** 曰、然則所謂敬者、又若何而用力邪。

**A5.** 曰、程子於此、嘗以主一無適言之矣、嘗以整齊嚴肅言之矣。至其門人謝氏之說、則又有所謂常惺惺法者焉、尹氏之說、則又有所謂其心收斂不容一物者焉。觀是數說、足以見其用力之方矣。

**Question:** With regard to the so-called 'conscientiousness' as you just mentioned, could you please elaborate more upon the practical means of it?

**Answer:** Master Cheng Yi used to clarify that point in terms of concentrating on oneness and of cultivating a focused, undivided mind, in other places he also interpreted it as tidiness and earnestness. As this doctrine was transmitted to his disciples, there emerged the so-called the method of 'being constant vigilant' composed by Xie and that of 'keeping the mind so focused and pure that no trace of anything is to be seen in it' by Yin. By looking at the above viewpoints, you should be able to see where to work hard on.

**Q6.** 曰、敬之所以爲學之始者然矣。其所以爲學之終也奈何。

**A6.** 曰、敬者、一心之主宰而萬事之本根也。知其所以用力之方、則知小學之不能無賴於此以爲始。知小學之賴此以始、則夫大學之不能無賴乎此以爲終者、可以一以貫之而無疑矣。蓋此心既立、由是格物致知以盡事物之理、則所謂尊德性而道問學。由是誠意正心以脩其身、則所謂先立其大者而小者不能奪。由是齊家治國以及乎天下、則所謂脩己以安百姓、篤恭而天下平。是皆未始一日而離乎敬也。然則敬之一字、豈非聖學始終之要也哉。

Question: It makes sense that one should hold fast to ‘conscientiousness’ at the early stage of learning, but I cannot understand why the practice of Confucian learning is supposed to be culminated in ‘conscientiousness’?

Answer: ‘Conscientiousness’ is to be regarded as the master of the mind and the root of the ten thousands things. Should one truly understand the means by which ‘conscientiousness’ is to be applied in practice, it would then be clear that the elementary learning cannot be initiated without one’s being conscientious, likewise the ultimate goal of the great learning cannot be achieved without one’s holding fast to conscientiousness. Thereupon, the principle of ‘conscientiousness’ has undoubtedly constituted a thread that runs through the program of learning as a whole.

Once the mind has been set upon it, one is about to practise the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge so as to probe the principles of things, thus proceed into the domain of cultivating moral virtues and of conducting intellectual enquiries. Following the same line, one moves to the program of personal cultivation in terms of keeping the will sincere and rectifying the flow of thoughts, so that the core of the function of mind will be firmly established and one will not be distracted as a result. Adhering to the same principle, one takes care of one’s family, governs the state and pacify the whole world at the end, that is the way to realise the meaning of ‘setting the citizens at ease through cultivating one’s own virtues and pacifying the whole world through a faithful and respectful manner’.

Therefore, the principle of being conscientious has never been abandoned for one single day, what else but the word ‘conscientiousness’ consists of the key to the divine learning from the very beginning to the end?

**Q7.**曰、然則此篇所謂在明明德、在新民、在止於至善者、亦可得而聞其說之詳乎。

**A7.** 曰、天道流行、發育萬物。其所以爲造化者、陰陽五行而已。而所謂陰陽五行者、又必有是理而後有是氣。及其生物、則又必因是氣之聚而後有是形。故人物之生、必得是理、然後有以爲健順仁義禮智之性、必得是氣、然後有以爲魂魄五臟百骸之身。周子所謂無極之真、二五之精、妙合而凝者、正謂是也。然以其理而言之、則萬物一原、固無人物貴賤之殊。以其氣而言之、則得其正且通者爲人、得其偏且塞者爲物。是以或貴或賤而不能齊也。彼賤而爲物者、既梏於形氣之偏塞而無以充其本體之全矣。唯人之生、乃得其氣之正且通者、而其性爲最貴。故其方寸之間、虛靈洞徹、萬理咸備。蓋其所以異於禽獸者正在於此、而其所以可爲堯舜、而能參天地以贊化育者亦不

外焉。是則所謂明德者也。然其通也、或不能無清濁之異、其正也、或不能無美惡之殊。故其所賦之質清者智而濁者愚、美者賢而惡者不肖、又有不能同者。必其上智大賢之資、乃能全其本體而無少不明。其有不及乎此、則所謂明德者已不能無蔽而失其全矣。況乎又以氣質有蔽之心、接乎事物無窮之變、則其目之欲色、耳之欲聲、口之欲味、鼻之欲臭、四肢之欲安佚、所以害乎其德者、又豈可勝言也哉。二者相因、反覆深固。是以此德之明、日益昏昧、而此心之靈、其所知者、不過情欲利害之私而已。是則雖曰有人之形、而實何以遠於禽獸。雖曰可以爲堯舜而參天地、而亦不能有以自充矣。然而本明之體得之於天、終有不可得而昧者。是以雖其昏蔽之極、而介然之頃一有覺焉、則卽此空隙之中而其本體已洞然矣。是以聖人施教、旣已養之於小學之中、而復開之以大學之道。其必先之以格物致知之說者、所以使之卽其所養之中、而因其所發、以啓其明之之端也。繼之以誠意正心脩身之目者、則又所以使之因其已明之端、而反之於身、以致其明之之實也。夫既有以啓其明之之端、而又有以致其明之之實、則吾之所得於天而未嘗不明者、豈不超然無有氣質物欲之累、而復得其本體之全哉。是則所謂明明德者、而非有所作爲於性分之外也。然其所謂明德者、又人人之所同得、而非有我之得私也。向也俱爲物欲之所蔽、則其賢愚之分固無以大相遠者。今吾旣幸有以自明矣、則視彼衆人之同得乎此而不能自明者、方且甘心迷惑沒溺於卑污苟賤之中而不自知也、豈不爲之惻然而思有以救之哉。故必推吾之所自明者以及之、始於齊家、中於治國、而終及於平天下、使彼有是明德而不能自明者、亦皆有以自明而去其舊染之污焉。是則所謂新民者、而亦非有所付畀增益之也。然德之在己而當明、與其在民而當新者、則又皆非人力之所爲、而吾之所以明而新之者、又非可以私意苟且而爲也。是其所以得之於天而見於日用之間者、固已莫不各有本然一定之則。程子所謂以其義理精微之極、有不可得而名者、故姑以至善目之。而傳所謂君之仁、臣之敬、子之孝、父之慈、與人交之信、乃其目之大者也。衆人之心固莫不有是、而或不能知。學者雖或知之、而亦鮮能必至於是而不去。此爲大學之教者、所以慮其理雖粗復、而有不純、已雖粗克、而有不盡、且將無以盡夫脩己治人之道、故必指是而言、以爲明德新民之標的也。欲明德而新民者、誠能求必至是而不容其少有過不及之差焉、則其所以去人欲而復天理者、無毫髮之遺恨矣。大抵大學一篇之指、總而言之不出乎八事、八事之要、總而言之又不出乎此三者。此愚所以斷然以爲大學之綱領而無疑也。然自孟子沒而道學不得其傳、世之君子各以其意之所便者爲學。於是乃有不務明其明德、而徒以政教法度爲足以新民者、又有愛身獨善自謂足以明其明德不屑乎新民者、又有略知二者之當務、顧乃安於小成、狃於近利、而不求止於至善之所在者。是皆不考乎此篇之過。其能成己成物而不謬者鮮矣。

Question: May I ask you to elaborate in detail on the three items of the great learning—to resume the enlightening virtue, to renew the people and to repose in the ultimate goodness?

Answer: In the universal movement of the divine power lies the key to the creation and sustenance of the ten thousand things. The secret of the universal creation consists in the two types of the cosmic force Yin -Yang and the five elements. And the existence of the Yin -Yang and the five elements entails both of the Principle and the cosmic matter, and the former is prior to the latter. When it comes to the creation of particular things, it is due to the integration of the cosmic matter that each takes its own form. Therefore, the birth of human and all other beings is conditioned by the Principle which gives rise to the innate natures such as the quality of being vigorous and submissive and the four moral principles—humaneness, righteousness, propriety and wisdom; and by the cosmic matter that composes the body which consists of the two types (negative and positive) of vital energy, the five organs and the one hundred bones of the skeleton. That is what Master Chou means by the core of the Non-ultimate, the essence of Yin-Yang and the five elements, and the miraculous integration and crystallisation of the above agents.

Seeing the ten thousand things in light of the Principle, we will come to the conclusion that all things share the same origin thus no distinction should be made between human species and other beings, between nobility and vulgarity. Whereas in light of the cosmic matter we may see the difference between human and other sentient beings in the sense that human is endowed with the pure and well-circulated part of the cosmic matter and others the impure and blocked part of it, hence arise the distance between the noble and the vulgar. Whatever falls into the category of vulgarity will stand little chance of realising the whole truth of the original substance due to the inherent tendency of being obsessed by the imperfect form and the impure energy of its own. Human beings are the only species that have been endowed with the pure and all-pervading part of the cosmic matter, hence possess the most noble and sublime nature.

That is why in the very organ whose size is no more than one square inch lies the invisible and miraculous faculties of mind in which reside the ten thousand principles. That is exactly what distinguishes man from the animals and what allows man to attain sagehood like Yao and Shun and be able to stand between Heaven and earth so as to participate into the cosmic transformation as a co-creator. That also indicates what the ancients mean by the enlightening virtue.



Nonetheless, it is worth noting that the difference between the pure and impure is not to be eliminated in spite of the fact that mankind as a whole has been granted with the well-circulated part of the primitive matter. Likewise, the distinction between the benign and the malign cannot be erased although mankind as a whole possesses the pure part of the cosmic matter. Hence those who are endowed with the purer quality of the cosmic matter tend to be wise whereas those who are endowed with the cosmic matter of a less pure quality turn out to be dull; those who are endowed with the kind of benign cosmic matter are likely to be benevolent whereas those who are endowed with the kind of malign cosmic matter are prone to malice.

Only one who is born with the supreme innate capacity to become a sage will be able to fully realise the divine nature. As for one who has managed to obtain such a divine consciousness to a less degree, his awareness of the enlightening virtue will hardly be perfect and complete. To those who are less gifted, the situation will be less favourable in the sense that one is applying one's defective mind to the ever-changing external things hence will unavoidably be obsessed with the sensual desires—eyes for colour, ears for sound, mouth for flavour, and the four limbs for physical comfort, which will in turn do tremendous harm to the innate virtue.

Clearly the two factors—the inherent defect lies in the primitive matter one is endowed with and the temptation of the external world—will repeatedly influence each other and each will be strengthened as a result of that. Thus the brilliance of this innate virtue will be overshadowed and the miraculous faculty of mind may only reach the domain of personal emotions and desires, and be occupied with calculating of advantages and disadvantages. In that case, man is not much different from an animal despite being endowed with a human body. Although man has the potential to become a sage and form a trinity with Heaven and earth, the way to self-fulfilment is somehow blocked in reality.

Nonetheless, it is worth bearing in mind that the innate enlightening nature as a heavenly gift for mankind will by no means be utterly overshadowed. Therefore the possibility is still there even for the most ignorant, somehow they can be awakened out of blue and the true nature will be illuminated at that moment. For that reason, the sages have established a system of education in which the innate nature is to be nurtured in the stage of the elementary learning and then be illuminated through the way of the great learning. And it is essential to start the process of the great learning with the practice of the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge, because in so

doing one's well-nourished innate nature as a result of the elementary is to be stimulated in one's contacting with the external things, thus the intellectual faculty is to be activated. It will then be followed by the programs of the sincerity of wills, the rectification of mind and the personal cultivation, so that one may apply the newly awakened intellectual power to self-reflection, hence illuminate the innate nature with genuine knowledge.

As long as the intellectual faculty is activated and the innate nature is illuminated with genuine knowledge, what man has received from Heaven will be fully resumed; man will then be free from the material temptations and the sensual desires as a result. Therefore what the ancients mean by resuming the enlightening virtue does not indicate the attempt to get on with something beyond the realm of human nature. On the contrary, the so-called enlightening virtue refers to what has been granted to all human beings, not to my own private property.

Since we all used to be obsessed with the physical desires, no big contrast between the worthies and the ignorant ones was seen in the past. Now I am fortunate to have obtained a realisation of my innate nature, when looking at those who have possessed the same nature yet remain ignorant of it and are not averse to being caught in the situation of abjection, filth, contemptibility with little awareness, I cannot help feeling sympathy for them and trying to save them from that state. Therefore, I have to extend what I have realised so as to reach them by taking care of my family as a starting point, then moving on to governing my state, and ending in pacifying the whole world. In so doing, those who are endowed with the same enlightening virtue yet unable to realise it by themselves will obtain self-realisation and be free from the contaminants they used to be obsessed with.

In that sense, the effort in renewing the people denotes nothing that is to be imposed upon or added to them. The reasons for realising my own enlightening virtue and fulfilling the duty of renewing the people so as to awaken the same virtue lying in them do not consist in the domain of human power; and the legitimacy of such attempts is not to be conditioned by my personal preferences and arbitrariness. It is due to the unchangeable Principle inherent in the heavenly gift for man which can also become manifest in the daily affairs that the above activities run their course. That is what master Cheng means by the ultimate subtlety of the Principle which is hard to describe, for the sake of convenience, we temporally regard it as the ultimate good, whose major contents are to be seen in the moral principles such as the humanity required of being a

king, the respectful manner of being a minister, the benevolence of being a father and the faithfulness in interacting with each other. None of those is not to be found in the mind of the ignorant mass, yet lies dormant in some cases. The scholars may be aware of it to some extent, but seldom resolve on attaining the ultimate good.

For those reasons, the item of attaining the ultimate good is included in the doctrine of the great learning and serves as the goal of the other two—resuming the enlightening virtue and renewing the people. The concept of the ultimate good is in particular addressed to those who have managed to retain the Principle to a certain degree, thus hold on to a understanding of it that is far from perfect; and those who have overcome their selfishness to some extent and gone halfway towards mastering it, in hope of leading them to complete the journey in terms of personal cultivation as well as interpersonal governance. Should one embark on resuming the enlightening virtue and on renewing the people, and resolve to attain the ultimate good in a sense that he would never stop until the perfect point, which implies the mean state between the two extremes of overdoing and under-doing, is finally reached, in that case, one will be able to overcome the human desires and retain the heavenly Principle to great length, hence have nothing to regret for.

Generally speaking, the core of *The Great Learning* consists in the eight steps, and the core of the eight steps lies in the three programs which, I firmly believe, constitute the framework of the system of the great learning. Unfortunately, the way of Confucian learning has fallen from grace since the death of Mencius, and the gentlemen of the time simply pick whatever seems to be convenient as the content of their learning. Thus emerged the various trends under the current academic circumstance, one merely takes political administration and legislation system as sufficient equipment for renewing the people hence pays no attention to the program of resuming the enlightening virtue; and the other concentrates on a solitary approach to self-perfection and claims that practice in self-cultivation alone will be adequate to lead one to resume the enlightening virtue, hence shows no interest in renewing the people. There is another group who seems to understand the necessity of being engaged with both of the programs, yet seldom resolves to achieve the ultimate goodness, and often gets stuck on some minor successes and is contented with the short-term benefit. In a word, they are all mistaken in understanding *The Great Learning*, as a result, they will hardly succeed in achieving self-fulfilment or helping others to realise their potentials.

**Q8.** 曰、程子之改親爲新也何所據、子之從之又何所考、而必其然耶。且以己意輕改經文。恐非傳疑之義。奈何。

**A8.** 曰、若無所考而輒改之、則誠若吾子之譏矣。今親民云者、以文義推之則無理。新民云者、以傳文考之則有據。程子於此其所以處之者亦已審矣。矧未嘗去其本文、而但曰某當作某、是乃漢儒釋經不得已之變例、而亦何害於傳疑耶。若必以不改爲是、則世蓋有承誤踵訛、心知非是、而故爲穿鑿附會、以求其說之必通者矣。其侮聖言而誤後學也益甚。亦何足取以爲法耶。

Question: Master Cheng has changed the word *qin* [親] (literally love) to *xin* [新] (literally new), and you seem to be in line with him on that point. Could you please let us know upon what ground such an alteration is based and for what scriptural reasons do you follow and confirm his view in that regard? Besides, I'm afraid changing the scriptural text in accordance with one's personal ideas is not what the commentary writing aims for, what do you think?

Answer: Provided the scriptural text is to be altered without further exploration, it is truly like what you have mocked of. But in this case, the phrase *qinmin* [親民]-loving the people does not fit the context and seems to be nonsensical, whereas the phrase *xinmin* [新民]-renewing the people makes perfect sense if referring to the text of the relevant comment on it. In his treatment of this part, Master Cheng has taken that into consideration. He did not delete it from the original text, instead pointed out this word should be understood as such, which is simply an unavoidable change as what the Han scholars do. What harm will that do to the commentary writing? Should one take preserving the original text as a golden rule in scriptural study, consequently some will repeat the defective points despite knowing the errors, and even deliberately give strained interpretations and draw farfetched analogies so as to make it sound coherent. In so doing, they are smearing the words of the sages and misleading the younger generations. So what is the point of following their footsteps?

**Q9.** 曰、知止而后有定、定而后能靜、靜而后能安、安而后能慮、慮而后能得、何也。

**A9.** 曰、此推本上文之意、言明德新民所以止於至善之由也。蓋明德新民固皆欲其止於至善。然非先有以知夫至善之所在、則不能有以得其所當止者而止之。如射者固欲其中夫正鵠。然不先有以知其正鵠之所在、則不能有以得其所當中者而中之也。知止云者、物格知至而於天下之事皆有以知其至善之所在。是則吾所當止之地也。能知所止、則方寸之間、事事物物、皆有定理矣。理既有定、則無以動其心而能靜矣。心既能靜、

則無所擇於地而能安矣。能安、則日用之間、從容閒暇、事至物來有以揆之而能慮矣。能慮、則隨事觀理、極深、研幾、無不各得其所止之地而止之矣。然既真知所止、則其必得所止、固已不甚相遠。其間四節、蓋亦推言其所以然之故有此四者、非如孔子之志學以至從心、孟子之善信以至聖神、實有等級之相懸、為終身經歷之次序也。

Question: ‘Only if one knows where one ultimately aims for can one find a place to anchor; only if one knows where to anchor can one fix one’s mind and heart; only if one has had one’s mind and heart fixed can one obtain peace and tranquillity; only in peace and tranquillity can one live with contentedness and ease; only in a state of contentedness and ease can one consider and contemplate; and only through consideration and contemplation can one achieve the ultimate aim.’<sup>590</sup> Why is it stated this way?

Answer: The above reasoning is based upon the meaning of the preceded paragraph, in order to illuminate the reasons why the programs of resuming the enlightening virtue and renewing the people should be culminated in the ultimate goodness. Surely both of the practice of resuming the enlightening virtue and that of renewing the people should finally reside in the ultimate goodness. However, it would be impossible to obtain that ultimate aim and take residence in it unless one has acquired some knowledge of where the ultimate goodness lies. Like an archer who intends to hit the target in practising archery, had he fail to know where the target is in advance, he would stand no chance of finding the target and hitting it. The term ‘knowing where to rest’ indicates the state after things have been investigated, knowledge extended and the ultimate goodness of everything under the heaven has been comprehended. That is what I mean by the place where one should finally reside. Having known the place to rest upon, one will come to see that everything has possessed an inherent principle in it, which is also something internal to one’s mind.

Once that is realised, then the mind will not be disturbed hence be able to attain the state of tranquillity and peace. After peace and tranquillity has been found in one’s mind, one will always be contented wherever one is. Being contented, one will be able to handle the surroundings with leisure and ease in daily routine, and precisely estimate things at hands so as to take all into consideration. That being able to give full consideration to things means one’s capacity for thorough observation has been developed, thus one will survey the principles in dealing with things and enter into the

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<sup>590</sup> James Legge’s translation of *The Great Learning*, <http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/c/confucius/c748g/>

most profound and thorough exploration, eventually all will rest at the most appropriate place. Should one be truly aware of the resting point, certainly one would not be too far from achieving it. The four points in between (knowing the resting point and achieving the resting point) are illustrating the reasons for that, which differs from what Confucius had been through—from setting the mind on learning to following the desires of the heart without transgressing the rules, or what Mencius had claimed—from being desirable, faithful to the sagely and miraculous state. The latter indicates a variety of levels and the sequence one will go through in a life-long self- cultivation.

**Q10.** 曰、物有本末、事有終始、知所先後、則近道矣、何也。

**A10.** 曰、此結上文兩節之意也。明德新民兩物而內外相對。故曰本末。知止能得一事而首尾相因。故曰終始。誠知先其本而後其末、先其始而後其終也、則其進爲有序、而至於道也不遠矣。

**Question:** It will be very close to the Way that being able to distinguish the essential and the minor details in dealing with things, keeping up the same spirit from the beginning to the end and knowing the proper sequence. Why?

**Answer:** That is to conclude the meaning of the last two paragraphs. For the practice of resuming the enlightening virtue as an internal issue is corresponding to that of renewing the people which is relatively an external matter, thus one serves as the essential, the other as the minor details. Knowing the resting point allows one to complete a task once starting it, hence the starting and the ending of an operation will be inter-dependent, for that reason, it is called the end and the start. Should one truly understand that the essential is prior to the minor details and the end is preceded by the start, one would proceed in accordance with the appropriate order and be no far from the Way.

**Q11.** 曰、古之欲明明德於天下者先治其國、欲治其國者先齊其家、欲齊其家者先脩其身、欲脩其身者先正其心、欲正其心者先誠其意、欲誠其意者先致其知、致知在格物、何也。

**A11.** 曰、此言大學之序其詳如此。蓋綱領之條目也。格物·致知·誠意·正心·脩身者、明明德之事也。齊家·治國·平天下者、新民之事也。格物·致知、所以求知至善之所在、自誠意以至於平天下、所以求得夫至善而止之也。所謂明明德於天下者、自明其明德而推以新民、使天下之人皆有以明其明德也。人皆有以明其明德、則各誠其意、各正

其心、各脩其身、各親其親、各長其長、而天下無不平矣。然天下之本在國。故欲平天下者必先有以治其國。國之本在家。故欲治國者必先有以齊其家。家之本在身。故欲齊家者必先有以脩其身。至於身之主則心也。一有不得其本然之正、則身無所主。雖欲勉強以脩之、亦不可得而脩矣。故欲脩身者必先有以正其心。而心之發則意也。一有私欲雜乎其中、而爲善去惡或有未實、則心爲所累、雖欲勉強以正之、亦不可得而正矣。故欲正心者必先有以誠其意。若夫知則心之神明、妙衆理而宰萬物者也。人莫不有、而或不能使其表裏洞然無所不盡、則隱微之間、眞妄錯雜、雖欲勉強以誠之、亦不可得而誠矣。故欲誠意者必先有以致其知。致者、推致之謂、如喪致乎哀之致。言推之而至於盡也。至於天下之物、則必各有所以然之故、與其所當然之則。所謂理也。人莫不知、而或不能使其精粗隱顯究極無餘、則理所未窮、知必有蔽。雖欲勉強以致之、亦不可得而致矣。故致知之道、在乎卽事觀理以格夫物。格者、極至之謂、如格于文祖之格。言窮之而至其極也。此大學之條目、聖賢相傳所以教人爲學之次第、至爲纖悉。然漢魏以來、諸儒之論未聞有及之者。至唐韓子乃能援以爲說而見於原道之篇。則庶幾其有聞矣。然其言極於正心誠意、而無曰致知格物云者、則是不探其端而驟語其次。亦未免於擇焉不精、語焉不詳之病矣。何乃以是而議荀揚哉。

Question: The ancients who intend to resume the enlightening virtue all over the world will firstly govern their own country; in order to govern their own country, they have to take care of their own family in advance; in order to take care of their own families, they have to cultivate themselves; in order to cultivate themselves, they have to rectify their mind; in order to rectify their mind, they have to retain the sincerity of their will; in order to retain the sincerity of their will, they have to extend the knowledge of their own; in order to extend the knowledge of their own; and the key to the extension of knowledge lies in the investigation of things. Why?

Answer: That is an explanation of the order of the great learning which indicates the contents of the main programs. The practice of the investigation of things, the extension of knowledge, the sincerity of will, the rectification of mind and of self-cultivation all fall into the category of resuming the enlightening virtue. The issues with regard to taking care of the family and governing the country fall into the category of renewing the people. The attempts of investigating things and extending knowledge aim to know where the ultimate goodness lies. All the efforts, from the sincerity of will onwards till the practice of pacifying the world, aim to attain the state of the ultimate goodness and dwell within it.

What it means by resuming the enlightening virtue all over the world is that one should firstly embark on resuming one's own enlightening virtue, and then extend it to renewing the people so that people all over the world will have their enlightening virtues resumed. If all have resumed their enlightening virtue, then each will keep his will sincere, rectify his mind, cultivate himself, love his parents and respect his elder siblings. In that case, there will be nowhere in the world that is not in peace. However, the substantial element of the world lies in each state, so one who wants to pacify the world must have firstly governed one's own state. Likewise, the substantial element of a state lies in each family, so one who wants to govern the state must have firstly taken care of one's own family. And the core of a family lies in each person, so one who wants to take care of one's family must have firstly practised self-cultivation.

Whereas the body is subject to the command of the mind, once the mind deviates from its original propriety, the body will be in the absence of its master. Even though one intends to bring oneself into self-cultivation, it will be hardly successful. Therefore, self-cultivation must be preceded by rectification of the mind. What is issuing from the mind becomes the will, once the will is contaminated by selfish desires, there will be untruthful element in one's reinforcing the good and in eliminating the evil, thus the mind will be caught up in such a state and will hardly be rectified despite all the forceful attempt in this regard.

That is why one has to firstly keep the will sincere if one intends to rectify the mind. Whereas the miraculous function of the mind consists in the human intellect which makes the principles exquisite and is the master of the ten thousand things. No one has been deprived of it, yet one may not be able to make full use of it, hence what is true will be mixed with what is false at the level of invisibility and subtlety, which makes it impossible to attain sincerity even though one deliberately works hard on it. Therefore, the sincerity of will must be preceded by the extension of knowledge. The word 'extension' literally means to stretch out and reach the end. For instance, the operation of a funeral will culminate in arousing the feeling of condolence, meaning to extend it to the utmost.

Whereas everything in the world possesses the ontological reasons ('to be') and the moral rules ('ought to be'), to which the so-called principles refer. No one fails to know it, yet one may not be able to explore all the details to the utmost including the subtle and the crude, the implicit and the explicit. Hence the principles are yet to be completed and the knowledge will be imperfect likewise. In spite of deliberate effort being put into



it, one will hardly succeed in extending the knowledge. So the key to the extension of knowledge lies in observing and investigating the principles of things at hand. And word ‘investigating’ means ‘reaching the ultimate’, like reaching the most remote ancestor, meaning to investigate it thoroughly and completely.

These are the programs of the great learning, and the profound and complete procedure that the ancient sages and worthies had followed in the way of teaching people. However, one hardly sees any work produced by the Confucian scholars had ever reached this point since the Han and Wei dynasties. Not until the Tang Dynasty had it been mentioned by Han Yu in his *An Inquiry on the Way*, however, his work focuses on the rectification of mind and the sincerity of wills and pays no attention to the extension of knowledge and the investigation of things, which seems to have skipped the step of exploring the origin and started with the secondary stuff. Thus Han’s work is still not free from mistakes due to his failure in prioritising the tasks and in giving detailed explanations, in that sense his work is not qualified to form a criticism of Xun Zi and Yang Zhu.

**Q12.** 曰、物格而后知至、知至而后意誠、意誠而后心正、心正而后身脩、身脩而后家齊、家齊而后國治、國治而后天下平、何也。

**A12.** 曰、此覆說上文之意也。物格者、事物之理各有以詣其極而無餘之謂也。理之在物者既詣其極而無餘、則知之在我者亦隨所詣而無不盡矣。知無不盡、則心之所發能一於理而無自欺矣。意不自欺、則心之本體、物不能動而無不正矣。心得其正、則身之所處不至陷於所偏而無不脩矣。身無不脩、則推之天下國家亦舉而措之耳。豈外此而求之智謀功利之末哉。

**Question:** After the things have been investigated, it will be followed by the extension of knowledge, the extension of knowledge by the sincerity of will, and the sincerity of will by the rectification of mind, the rectification of mind by the self-cultivation, the self-cultivation by the regulation of family, and the regulation of family by the governance of the state, the governance of the state by the pacification of the world. Why?

**Answer:** That is to repeat what has been said in the previous paragraph. That having the things investigated means to have attained to the ultimate and have grasped the whole picture of the principles of things. Once the principles inherent in the things have been attained to the utmost, the knowledge inherent in me will become complete accordingly.

Once the self-knowledge become complete, whatever issuing from the mind will be in tune with the Principle, hence self-deception will be avoided. If the will is void of self-deception, the entity of the mind will be established whose uprightness will never be waned by the external things. Once the uprightness of the mind is established, one will not get stuck on one corner but cultivate oneself in all aspects. Being fully engaged with self-cultivation, one will be able to extend it in further so as to handle the national and international affairs with ease, which is totally different from those who have forsaken self-cultivation and focus on polishing tactics and pursuing profits which are merely minor details.

**Q13.** 曰、篇首之言明明德以新民爲對、則固專以自明爲言矣。後段於平天下者、復以明明德言之、則似新民之事亦在其中。何其言之不一而辨之不明耶。

**A13.** 曰、篇首三言者、大學之綱領也。而以其實主對待先後次第言之、則明明德者又二言之綱領也。至此後段、然後極其體用之全、而一言以舉之、以見夫天下雖大、而吾心之體無不該、事物雖多、而吾心之用無不貫。蓋必析之有以極其精而不亂、然後合之有以盡其大而無餘。此又言之序也。

**Question:** At the beginning of this text, the program of resuming the enlightening virtue parallels that of renewing the people, which obviously intends to focus on self-illumination. Yet the statement of resuming the enlightening virtue reappears in the paragraph as to pacifying the world, as if the issue of renewing the people had been included in it. How come your statement is so inconsistent and ambiguous?

**Answer:** The three programs listed at the beginning constitute the outline of the great learning. However, so long as the priority and the procedure are concerned, the program of resuming the enlightening virtue becomes the outline of the other two and runs through them. At the end, it comes to an all-embracing conclusion in terms of the wholesome of the substance and the function, and summarises it in one sentence. In that way, it makes it very clear that the substance of my mind pervades all despite the immenseness of the world; and the function of my mind covers all despite the numerousness of the things. Therefore, it is necessary to analyse it so as to exhaust all the minor details in an appropriate order, and then generalise it so as to complete its abundance with no exclusion. That is the procedure of articulation.

**Q14.** 曰、自天子以至於庶人、壹是皆以脩身爲本、其本亂而末治者否矣、其所厚者薄而其所薄者厚未之有也、何也。

**A14.** 曰、此結上文兩節之意也。以身對天下國家而言、則身爲本而天下國家爲末。以家對國與天下而言、則其理雖未嘗不一、然其厚薄之分、亦不容無等差矣。故不能格物致知以誠意、正心而脩其身、則本必亂而末不可治。不親其親、不長其長、則所厚者薄而無以及人之親長。此皆必然之理也。孟子所謂於所厚者薄、無所不薄、其言蓋亦本於此云。

**Question:** From the Son of Heaven (the emperor) to the ordinary mass, all adhere to the principle of self-cultivation which is treated as the root. It will never last if the root is in chaos whereas the branches in good order, nor will there a possibility that what has been cherished bears less importance than what is less privileged. Why?

**Answer:** That is to conclude the meaning of the previous two paragraphs. So far as person and state are concerned, the former is the root and the latter the branches. With regard to family, state and the whole world, the distinction between the thick and the thin ought not to be ignored, and the differentiation in between should be realised, although the principles of which do not vary. Hence one who fails to carry out the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge so as to keep one's will sincere, to rectify the mind and to perform self-cultivation, will be bound to spoil the root and leave the branches in chaos. One who does not love one's own parents or respect the elderly in one's own family, is neglecting what is thick, in that case, he will by no means extend his love for the parents and the elderly of others. That is for sure, just as what Mencius said 'if what is thick has been treated in a less attentive manner, then nothing will be taken seriously.'

**Q15.** 曰、治國平天下者、天子諸侯之事也。卿大夫以下、蓋無與焉。今大學之教、乃例以明明德於天下爲言。豈不爲思出其位、犯非其分、而何以得爲爲己之學哉。

**A15.** 曰、天之明命、有生之所同得、非有我之得私也。是以君子之心豁然大公、其視天下無一物而非吾心之所當愛、無一事而非吾職之所當爲。雖或勢在匹夫之賤、而所以堯舜其君、堯舜其民者、亦未嘗不在其分內也。又況大學之教、乃爲天子之元子衆子、公侯卿大夫士之適子、與國之俊選而設。是皆將有天下國家之責而不可辭者、則其所以素教而預養之者、安得不以天下國家爲己事之當然、而預求有以正其本、清其源哉。後世教學不明。爲人君父者慮不足以及此、而苟徇於目前。是以天下之治日常少、亂日常多、而敗國之君、亡家之主、常接迹於當世。亦可悲矣。論者不此之監、

而反以聖法爲疑。亦獨何哉。大抵以學者而視天下之事、以爲己事之所當然而爲之、則雖甲兵錢穀籩豆有司之事、皆爲己也。以其可以求知於世而爲之、則雖割股廬墓弊車羸馬、亦爲人耳。善乎張子敬夫之言曰、爲己者、無所爲而然者也。此其語意之深切、蓋有前賢所未發者。學者以是而日自省焉、則有以察乎義利之間而無毫釐之差矣。

Question: To govern the state and pacify the world are issues that only the kings and the ministers are qualified to take charge of. Those who stand in a position lower than ministers are not supposed to get involved. However the great learning proclaims the doctrine of resuming the enlightening virtue in the world, isn't that indicating the way in which one's thinking overrides one's commission and abuses one's lot? How could this kind of teaching be regarded as learning for one's own sake?

Answer: The decree of the Heaven is endowed upon all sentient beings; it is shared by all and cannot be taken as my private property. Therefore a gentleman should possess such an open mind and a broad heart that no single thing under the heaven will be excluded from his concern, and no one affair in the world will be beyond his duty. In spite of being a bumble citizen, he still takes it as his mission to follow the way of the ancient sages Yao and Shun in treating the king and the people. Besides the doctrine of the great learning is designed for the first-born prince and the other descendants of the king, for those who are from an esteemed family of the high officials, and for those who are selected for their own capacity. All of them are under the mission of taking charge of the country in the future, surely they should be educated and nourished by the teaching that what is happening in the whole country and the world should be taken as their own business. How would it be possible to expect them to rectify the origin and purify the branches if they were taught otherwise?

That point seems to have been obscured in the later education system. Neither the parents nor the kings are able to take it into consideration, what they can see is confined to the need of the present. Therefore the world is in chaos most of time and rarely rests in peace, and the kings of the defeated states and the lords of the collapsed families are constantly seen one after another till today, which is truly mournful. Whoever asks this question has failed to reflect on this and doubts the legitimacy of the sacred teaching on the contrary. Generally speaking, whoever regards the business of the whole world as one's own and takes it for granted to get on with it, is learning for one's own sake, regardless of the type of business one is engaged with, be it military, commercial, religious or official affairs. Provided one's action is motivated by being known by

others, even though he cut his thigh, living in a hut at graveyard, or travelling in a worn-out chariot pulled by a frail horse, he is doing for the sake of others.

Great are the words of the revered Zhang Jingfu, ‘one who does for one’s own sake, is doing without bearing in mind that he is doing.’ Such is the importance of this statement that it contains profound teaching that has never been expounded by the worthies of the past. Provided those who have engaged with Confucian learning carry out their daily self-reflection on this issue, the difference between righteousness and lucrativeness will be discerned and the subtle deviation will thus be avoided.

**Q16.** 曰、子謂正經蓋夫子之言而曾子述之、其傳則曾子之意而門人記之。何以知其然也。

**A16.** 曰、正經辭約而理備、言近而指遠。非聖人不能及也。然以其無他左驗、且意其或出於古昔先民之言也、故疑之而不敢質、至於傳文或引曾子之言、而又多與中庸孟子者合、則知其成於曾氏門人之手、而子思以授孟子無疑也。蓋中庸之所謂明善、即格物致知之功、其曰誠身、即誠意正心脩身之效也。孟子之所謂知性者、物格也。盡心者、知至也。存心養性脩身者、誠意正心脩身也。其他如謹獨之云、不慊之說、義利之分、常言之序、亦無不脗合焉者。故程子以爲孔氏之遺書、學者之先務、而論孟猶處其次焉。亦可見矣。

**Question:** You hold that the scriptural text contains the words of Confucius recorded by Zengzi, and the commentary on it represents the thought of Zengzi scribed by his disciples. How do you possibly know that?

**Answer:** The language of the scriptural text is concise yet contains complete truth; it concerns things at hand yet has far-reaching references, which cannot be attained by one who has not attained sagehood. However, as there is no other proof and the meaning of it may be derived from the ancient ancestors, I only bear the doubt in mind yet dare not to question it. With regard to the commentary, some parts of which cites the words of Zengzi, and most of those words are compatible with the thoughts expressed by *The Doctrine of the Mean* and *The Book of Mencius*. Due to that fact we know the commentary is composed by the disciples of Zengzi, and it is undoubtedly the doctrine that Zisi had handed down to Mencius. What is meant by ‘realising the goodness’ in *The Doctrine of the Mean* is equivalent to the effort in investigating the things and extending the knowledge; and what is meant by ‘cultivating sincerity in oneself’ to the effect of keeping the will sincere, having the mind rectified and the self cultivated.

Likewise what Mencius means by ‘knowing the nature’ is no other than having the things investigated; by ‘exhausting the mind’ having the knowledge extended; and by ‘preserving the mind, nourishing the nature and cultivating oneself’ keeping the will sincere, rectifying the mind and practising self-cultivation. Other sayings such as that of being vigilant in solitude, of lacking self-contentment, of differentiating righteousness from lucrativeness, and of the order of speech and action in normal manner, all go well with one another. That is why master Cheng regards this book as the posthumous work of Confucius, hence should be given priority over *The Analects* and *The Book of Mencius*, and being primarily studied as well.

**Q17.** 曰、程子之先是書而後論孟、又且不及乎中庸、何也。

**A17.** 曰、是書垂世立教之大典、通爲天下後世而言者也。論孟應機接物之微言、或因一時一事而發者也。是以是書之規模雖大、然其首尾該備而綱領可尋、節目分明而工夫有序、無非切於學者之日用。論孟之爲人雖切、然而問者非一人、記者非一手、或先後淺深之無序、或抑揚進退之不齊、其間蓋有非初學日用之所及者。此程子所以先是書而後論孟、蓋以其難易緩急言之、而非以聖人之言爲有優劣也。至於中庸、則又聖門傳授極致之言、尤非後學之所易得而聞者。故程子之教未遽及之。豈不又以爲論孟既通、然後可以及此乎。蓋不先乎大學、無以提挈綱領而盡論孟之精微。不參之論孟、無以融貫會通而極中庸之歸趣。然不會其極於中庸、則又何以建立大本、經綸大經、而讀天下之書、論天下之事哉。以是觀之、則務講學者固不可不急於四書、而讀四書者又不可不先於大學、亦已明矣。今之教者乃或棄此不務、而反以他說先焉。其不溺於虛空、流於功利、而得罪於聖門者幾希矣。

Question: Master Cheng gives this book priority over *The Analects* and *The Book of Mencius*, however his teaching does not seem to have touched on *The Doctrine of the Mean*, why?

Answer: This book serves as the great scripture whose teaching can be universally applied to the whole world and its words meant to be handed down generation after generation. By contrast, *The Analects* and *The Book of Mencius* contain the aphorisms referring to the way one interacts with the surroundings, or hold the words that arise from specific circumstances. In spite of its massive structure, this book is consistent from the beginning to the end, the outlines of which can be grasped, the programs included in which are clearly laid out, and whose method for self-cultivation provides step by step instructions relevant to the daily life of a learner.

Although the teachings of *The Analects* and *The Book of Mencius* are also relevant to things at hand, however in both cases more than one person are involved in asking questions and more than one involved in scribing. Hence it lacks a clear order in laying out the sequence and the depth of the questions, and in its hints on moral judgement. In both there are elements showing no clear relevance to daily life and which cannot be grasped by a beginner. That is why Master Cheng gives this book priority over *The Analects* and *The Book of Mencius* on the ground of the levels of difficulty and the degrees of urgency, which does not mean that he differentiates the words of the sages in terms of quality.

As for *The Doctrine of the Mean*, it retains the ultimate words that have been transmitted within the school of Confucianism, and that are particularly hard for the learners in later generations to hear or attain to. For that reason, it is not touched on by Master Cheng in his teaching. Does that not give the hint that once the teaching of *The Analects* and *The Book of Mencius* is mastered, the access to *The Doctrine of the Mean* will then be available? So one who fails to start with the book of *The Great Learning* will by no means be able to grasp the main themes and outlines, so as to comprehend the subtlety and profundity of *The Analects* and *The Book of Mencius*. Without referring to *The Analects* and *The Book of Mencius*, there is no chance of completely understanding the whole system of thought and attaining the ultimate truth in which *The Doctrine of the Mean* reposes.

Provided the ultimate teaching of *The Doctrine of the Mean* is not grasped, on what could one fall back to establish the great foundation (for one's learning) and to master the great scriptures, so that one will have the capacity for reading all books and discussing all affairs in the world? From that point of view, it is clear that those who engage with teaching Confucian classics cannot postpone the curriculum of *The Four Books*, and those who are studying *The Four Books* have to start with *The Great Learning*. Teachers nowadays may leave it aside and start with other teachings, very rarely will they escape from indulging in emptiness, getting lost in utilitarianism and deviating from the sacred teaching.

**Q18.** 或問、一章而下以至三章之半、鄭本元在沒世不忘之下、而程子乃以次於此謂知之至也之文。子獨何以知其不然、而遂以爲傳之首章也。

**A18.** 曰、以經統傳、以傳附經、則其次第可知而二說之不然審矣。

Question: According to the edition of Zheng, the text from the first to half of the third chapter follows by the phrase ‘never will it be forgotten generation after generation’. Whereas master Cheng posits it next to the sentence ‘that is what is meant by knowing to the utmost’. On what ground do you refute both of them and deem it the first chapter of the commentary?

Answer: Knowing that scripture serves to navigate commentary, and commentary affiliates to scripture, the proper order of these paragraphs will be clear and the fault of both views will be understood.

**Q19.** 曰、然則其曰克明德者、何也。

**A19.** 曰、此言文王能明其德也。蓋人莫不知德之當明而欲明之。然氣稟拘之於前、物欲蔽之於後。是以雖欲明之、而有不克也。文王之心渾然天理、亦無待於克之而自明矣。然猶云爾者、亦見其獨能明之而他人不能、又以見夫未能明者之不可不致其克之功也。

Question: However it says ‘controlling’ the enlightening virtue in the text, why?

Answer: It is meant to say that the King Wen is capable of resuming his own enlightening virtue. We all know that the innate virtue should be realised and also intend to do it, however, we are held back by the defective matter we are endowed with and the material desire we have acquired. Therefore we are not able to accomplish it despite our attempts to do so. The King Wen’s mind reflects nothing but the heavenly Principle, it is self-illuminating, not conditioned by human effort. The reason for saying so lies in two matters: to stress the point that no one but King Wen has the capacity for it; and to remind those who are not so capable of the necessity to make endeavours in this respect.

**Q20.** 曰、顧諟天之明命、何也。

**A20** 曰、人受天地之中以生。故人之明德非他也。即天之所以命我而至善之所存也。是其全體大用、蓋無時而不發見於日用之間。人惟不察於此、是以汨於人欲而不知所以自明。常目在之、而真若見其參於前倚於衡也、則成性存存而道義出矣。

Question: It says ‘attending to the decree of the Heaven with great cautiousness’, why?

Answer: Man standing between Heaven and earth is endowed with the essence of it. Therefore the enlightening virtue of man is nothing but the decree that Heaven grants me and the place where the ultimate goodness is accommodated. The whole substance and the principal function of it always manifest through things at hand in daily routine.



It is only because people do not attend to it, they are overwhelmed by the humanly desires and know little about how to attain self-illumination. Should one keep an eye on it at all times to the extent that it appears in the front while one is standing and emerges on the crowbar when one is sitting in the chariot, then the heavenly nature will be sustained and nourished, thereby the moral Principle arises.

**Q21.** 曰、克明俊德、何也。

**A21.** 曰、言堯能明其大德也。

Question: What does it by ‘being able to illuminate the lofty virtue’?

Answer: That means Yao is able to make illustrious his own lofty virtue.

**Q22.** 曰、是三者固皆自明之事也。然其言之亦有序乎。

**A22.** 曰、康誥通言明德而已。太甲則明天之未始不爲人、而人之未始不爲天也。帝典則專言成德之事而極其大焉。其言之淺深亦畧有序矣。

Question: Obviously these three are about the issue of self-illumination, is there an order to be followed in its wording?

Answer: *The Announcement of Kang* speaks about resuming the virtue in general. The text of *Tai Jia* means to illustrate that in the beginning the Heaven is no different from man and man is no different from the Heaven. *The Canon of the Emperor* (Yao) concentrates on the issue of fulfilling the innate virtue and represents the ultimate truth. It proceeds orderly in term of the depth of the meaning.

**Q23.** 或問、盤之有銘、何也。

**A23.** 曰、盤者、常用之器、銘者、自警之辭也。古之聖賢兢兢業業、固無時而不戒謹恐懼。然猶恐其有所怠忽而或忘之也。是以於其常用之器、各因其事而刻銘以致戒焉。欲其常接乎目、每警乎心、而不至於忽忘也。

Question: Script is carved on the bathtub, what is the reason for that?

Answer: Bathtub is a daily used utensil; script is a word of self-reminding. The ancient sages and worthies are so diligent in self-cultivation that they are constantly in the state of vigilance and conscientiousness. In spite of that, they still have concerns for temporary dissipation, therefore having some words carved on the daily used utensils in accordance with the situation for the purpose of self-restraint. Every time when the

script is seen, vigilance will be aroused inside, so that it will not be forgotten or neglected.

**Q24.** 曰、然則沐浴之盤、而其所刻之辭如此、何也。

**A24.** 曰、人之有是德、猶其有是身也。德之本明、猶其身之本潔也。德之明而利欲昏之、猶身之潔而塵垢汙之也。一旦存養省察之功、真有以去其前日利欲之昏而日新焉、則亦猶其疎瀹澡雪而有以去其前日塵垢之汙也。然既新矣、而所以新之之功不繼、則利欲之交將復有如前日之昏、猶既潔矣、而所以潔之之功不繼、則塵垢之集將復有如前日之汙也。故必因其已新而日日新之、又日新之、使其存養省察之功、無少間斷、則明德常明而不復爲利欲之昏、亦如人之一日沐浴而日日沐浴、又無日而不沐浴、使其疎瀹澡雪之功、無少間斷、則身常潔清而不復爲舊染之汙也。昔成湯所以反之而至於聖者、正惟有得於此。故稱其德者有曰、不邇聲色、不殖貨利。又曰、以義制事、以禮制心。有曰、從諫弗咈、改過不吝。又曰、與人不求備、檢身若不及。此皆足以見其日新之實。至於所謂聖敬日躋云者、則其言愈約而意愈切矣。然本湯之所以得此、又其學於伊尹而有發焉。故伊尹自謂與湯咸有一德、而於復政太甲之初、復以終始惟一、時乃日新、爲丁寧之戒。蓋於是時、太甲方且自怨自艾、於桐處仁遷義而歸、是亦所謂苟日新者。故復推其嘗以告于湯者告之、欲其日進乎此無所間斷、而有以繼其烈祖之成德也。其意亦深切矣。其後周之武王踐阼之初、受師尚父丹書之戒。曰、敬勝怠者吉、怠勝敬者滅、義勝欲者從、欲勝義者凶。退而於其几席觴豆刀劍戶牖莫不銘焉。蓋聞湯之風而興起者。今其遺語、尚幸頗見於禮書。願治之君、志學之士、皆不可以莫之考也。

**Question:** Why is this kind of script carved on the bathtub?

**Answer:** Man has this virtue just like he has this body. The virtue is initially illuminated just like the body is originally clean. The light of virtue can be obscured by man's craving for the worldly advantages, just like the body can be smeared by the dirt. Once attempt is made to retain and nourish the innate virtue and endeavours are put in self-reflection, one will be renewed daily as the craving for the worldly advantage is minimised. It works in the same way as one manages to get rid of the dirt that used to smudge his body. However, once the effort of renovating ceases, one will relapse into the obsession of the worldly desire as before. Just as the body, once being cleansed, would become dusty again if the effort of cleansing is discontinued. Therefore, once the renewing is initiated, it should be kept up on a daily basis; so that the work of retaining, nourishing and self-reflecting will not to be interrupted for a second, and the

light of the enlightening virtue will constantly shining out and one will not be obsessed with the worldly desires once more. Like one who is having a bath on a daily basis, so long as the cleansing work is not to be halted and the body will remain clean at all time, thus one will not relapse into the previous state of uncleanness. That is exactly the way through which the king Tang attained sagehood.

Some compliment his virtue in terms of ‘keeping distance from the temptation of the worldly music and beauty, staying away from breeding the material profit,’ and of ‘managing affairs through the principle of righteousness and restraining mind through the principle of propriety. Others describe it as ‘having no disobedience in taking advices and showing no stinginess in correcting mistakes,’ or ‘never demanding other people to be perfect and always concerning about his own lack of self-reflection’. All these are proof of his capacity for renewing his virtue day by day.

As for the so-called ascending daily in the quest for sageliness and conscientiousness, the more concise the language, the more compelling and profound is the implication. However the reason for Tang’s accomplishment could be traced back to what he had learned from Yi Yin and what he thus expounded. Therefore Yi Yin proclaimed his sharing the same virtue with the King Tang when he brought Tai Jia back to the throne, and admonished him to hold fast to the one doctrine throughout and to renew it daily. At that time Tai Jia just returned from Tong (the area where he had been sent into exile), he was still in deep remorse and had sincere yearning for virtue, thus was among those who just achieved self-renewal. Because of that, Yi Yin gave Tai Jia the same admonition as he used to advise Tang, in the hope that he would inherit the virtue accomplished by his ancestors. And the purport of his message runs deep.

Afterwards the King Wu of the Zhou Dynasty received the admonition of *Dan Shu*<sup>591</sup> from his great master-father Shang when he ascended to the throne. It goes as ‘that conscientiousness overrides idleness is auspicious, doing otherwise will be destroyed; one who allows righteousness to prevail over personal desire will fulfil himself, doing otherwise will be destructive and detrimental’. After hearing this, the King Wu had the script carved all over his bedchamber- his bed, his drinking vessels and dish utensils, his sword, the door and windows, he was inspired by the King Tang.

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<sup>591</sup> This book is believed to have retained the wisdom of the legendary sage kings such as Huang Di and Zhuan Xu.

His words are still preserved in *The Book of the Ritual*, to which one should not fail to refer, provided he is a king who wishes to govern the state or a noble man who resolves to embark on the Confucian learning.

**Q25.** 曰、此言新民。其引此何也。

**A25.** 曰、此自其本而言之。蓋以是爲自新之至、而新民之端也。

Question: Here the issue of renewing the people lies in the heart, what is the point of quoting all of these?

Answer: It is referring to the root, which means to deem it the end of self-renewal and the start of renewing people.

**Q26.** 曰、康誥之言作新民、何也。

**A26.** 曰、武王之封康叔也、以商之餘民染紂汙俗而失其本心也、故作康誥之書而告之以此。欲其有以鼓舞而作興之、使之振奮踴躍以去其惡而遷於善、舍其舊而進乎新也。然此豈聲色號令之所及哉。亦自新而已。

Question: In the *Announcement of Kang* it says ‘being a new person’, what does that mean?

Answer: After conferring this land upon Kang, the King Wu composed the *Announcement* to remind him thus and so, for the local people were so used to the ignoble custom of the deceased Shang that they had the least awareness of their original mind. He meant to invigorate and stimulate them, so that they would discard evil and take on virtue, forsake the old custom and attune to the new one. That will by no means be achieved through material comfort and verbal commandment, it is nothing but self-renewal.

**Q27.** 曰、孔氏小序以康誥爲成王周公之書、而子以武王言之、何也。

**A27.** 曰、此五峯胡氏之說也。蓋嘗因而考之、其曰朕弟寡兄云者、皆爲武王之自言。乃得事理之實、而其他證亦多。小序之言不足深信、於此可見。然非此書大義所關。故不暇於致詳、當別爲讀書者言之耳。

Question: In his brief preface master Kong reckons *the Announcement of Kang* as the work of the King Cheng and the reverend Zhou, but you deem it the words of the King Wu, why?

Answer: That is the viewpoint of Hu Wufeng. I had done some research because of that, from the titles such as ‘the younger brother of the king’ and ‘your elder brother’, we can see that it is the King Wu’s monologue, which is truly reasonable and also supported by suffice evidence. On this point it is very clear that the saying in that preface is not trustworthy. As it does not concern the main idea of this book, I would not expound it in detail, it should be elaborated somewhere else for the reader.

**Q28.** 曰、詩之言周雖舊邦、其命維新、何也。

**A28.** 曰、言周之有邦、自后稷以來千有餘年、至于文王、聖德日新而民亦丕變。故天命之以有天下。是其邦雖舊、而命則新也。蓋民之視效在君、而天之視聽在民。君德既新、則民德必新。民德既新、則天命之新亦不旋日矣。

Question: In the *Book of Poetry*, it is said, “Although Zhou was an ancient state the ordinance which lighted on it was new.”<sup>592</sup> What does that mean?

Answer: Since the state of Zhou was established, that means if we counted from the time of Hou Ji-the primogenitor of the Zhou family, it had been over a thousand of years. In the reign of the King Wen, the divine virtue was ever refreshed and an enormous change also occurred in the people. Therefore the ordinance of the country was new despite of its long history. As the people were watching the example of their king and trying to emulate, and in the people consisted the eyes and ears of Heaven. So long as the virtue of the king is renewed, the moral renewal of the people will come along. Once the people were morally refreshed, the ordinance of Heaven was to be soon renewed.

**Q29.** 曰、所謂君子無所不用其極者、何也。

**A29.** 曰、此結上文詩書之意也。蓋盤銘、言自新也。康誥、言新民也。文王之詩、自新新民之極也。故曰君子無所不用其極。極、卽至善之云也。用其極者、求其止於是而已矣。

Question: What is meant by ‘whatever he is engaged in, a gentleman will always do it to the utmost of his ability’?

Answer: That refers to the meaning of the preceding paragraph. The script on the bathtub is concerning self-renewal, the *Announcement of Kang* pertains to renewing the people. The poetry of the King Wen indicates the summit of self-renewal and renewing

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<sup>592</sup> James Legge’s translation.

the people. That is why it says ‘a gentleman never fails to do it to the utmost of his ability. The word ‘utmost’ means the ‘ultimate good’, and the phrase ‘doing it to the utmost’ ‘finally dwelling in this ultimate state’.

**Q30.** 或問、此引玄鳥之詩、何也。

**A30.** 曰、此以民之止於邦畿、而明物之各有所止也。

**Question:** What is the reason for quoting the poem of the black bird?

**Answer:** As the border of each state signifies where the people should stop, so there is always a resting spot that corresponds to each particular thing.

**Q31.** 曰、引綿蠻之詩、而系以孔子之言。孔子何以有是言也。

**A31.** 曰、此夫子說詩之辭也。蓋曰、鳥於其欲止之時、猶知其當止之處。豈可人爲萬物之靈、而反不如鳥之能知所止而止之乎。其所以發明人當知止之義、亦深切矣。

**Question:** Here it seems to quote a poetry composed by the uncivilised and then combine it with the words of Confucius, how on earth did Confucius ever utter this kind of words?

**Answer:** That is Confucius’s remark on poetry. He meant to say that when a bird intends to rest, it knows where the resting place is. How come a human being, ranking the top of all sentient beings, does not have as clear an idea of his own resting place as a bird does? It gives the hint that man should seek a resting place, which is of profound and practical significance.

**Q32.** 曰、引文王之詩、而繼以君臣父子與國人交之所止、何也。

**A32.** 曰、此因聖人之止、以明至善之所在也。蓋天生烝民、有物有則、是以萬物庶事莫不各有當止之所。但所居之位不同、則所止之善不一。故爲人君、則其所當止者在於仁、爲人臣、則其所當止者在於敬、爲人子、則其所當止者在於孝、爲人父、則其所當止者在於慈、與國人交、則其所當止者在於信。是皆天理人倫之極致、發於人心之不容已者、而文王之所以爲法於天下可傳於後世者、亦不能加毫末於是焉。但衆人類爲氣稟物欲之所昏。故不能常敬而失其所止。唯聖人之心表裏洞然、無有一毫之蔽。故連續光明自無不敬、而所止者莫非至善。不待知所止、而後得所止也。故傳引此詩而歷陳所止之實、使天下後世得以取法焉。學者於此誠有以見其發於本心之不容已者而緝熙之、使其連續光明無少間斷、則其敬止之功、是亦文王而已矣。詩所謂上天之載、無聲無臭、儀刑文王、萬邦作孚、正此意也。

Question: The quotation of the poetry of the King Wen is followed by the morals in which one should find repose in dealing with the relations of ruler-subjects and of father-son, as well as one's interaction with his fellow citizens. What are the reasons for that?

Answer: From the place whereby a sage dwells, we shall see the repose in which the ultimate good lies. Heaven, in the course of generating the numerous human beings, has endowed all things with specific principles, hence an appropriate repose is inherent in all things and affairs. As things stand in different positions, so does the goodness vary accordingly whereupon each individual thing finally dwells. Therefore being a ruler, one ought to seek resting in 'humanity'; being a subject, one should seek resting in 'conscientiousness'; being a son, one should seek resting in 'filial piety'; being a father, one should seek resting in 'kindness'; and in contacting with the fellow citizens, one should seek resting in 'truthfulness'.

All of these hold the Heavenly Principle and human ethics to the ultimate, which emanate from the depth of the human mind, and contain such complete and conclusive truth that nothing whatsoever is supposed to be added upon it, even in the case of the King Wen who, on that account, set an example for the whole world which was to be transmitted to the generations to come. Since the ordinary people are tainted by the impurity of the matter they are endowed with and the physical desires of their own, they cannot persistently hold fast to the way of 'conscientiousness', and thus miss the point where they are supposed to repose.

Only the mind of a sage is entirely pure and is not being obscured at all, therefore is able to be constantly illuminated and never fails to be conscientious, and repose nowhere but in the ultimate good. In the case of a sage, it is not necessary that he has to know where to repose before formally reposes there. For these reasons, the poetry is quoted here to illustrate the factuality of the reposing point, so that people in the later generations will have an example to emulate. Should one truly realise what is derived from his original mind on this respect and hold on to it so as to keep this light constantly shining out, his attainment concerning the ability of maintaining conscientious mind and of reposing the most appropriate place will be no different from that of King Wen. That is what it means by the poetry: 'the way that the almighty Heaven sustains (the universe) is inaudible and beyond the perception of the sense of smell. The ritual and registration set up by the King Wen are to be adopted and verified in the ten thousand states.'

**Q33.** 曰、子之說詩、既以敬止之止爲語助之辭、而於此書又以爲所止之義、何也。

**A33.** 曰、古人引詩斷章、或姑借其辭以明己意。未必皆取本文之義也。

Question: According to Confucius' remarks on poetry, the word 'reposing (止)' that is combined with the word 'conscientiousness (敬)' is deemed an auxiliary word to enhance the mode of the speaking, how come in this book it means 'where to repose'?

Answer: When the ancients picked some poetry from a context, sometimes they simply quoted it to illustrate their own ideas, therefore it is not necessarily in line with the meaning of the original text.

**Q34.** 曰、五者之目、詞約而義該矣。子之說乃復有所謂究其精微之蘊、而推類以通之者。何其言之衍而不切耶。

**A34.** 曰、舉其德之要而總名之、則一言足矣。論其所以爲是一言者、則其始終本末豈一言之所能盡哉。得其名而不得其所以名、則仁或流於姑息、敬或墮於阿諛、孝或陷父、而慈或敗子。且其爲信亦未必不爲尾生白公之爲也。又況傳之所陳、姑以見物各有止之凡例。其於大倫之目猶且闕其二焉。苟不推類以通之、則亦何以盡天下之理哉。

Question: Despite being concisely articulated, what the preceding five items imply is all-inclusive. Your interpretation contains the words such as 'ponders upon the refined and subtle implications of them, and further extends (this conception) analogically to the understanding of others.' For what reasons do you give such an utterance that sounds excessive and not closely attached to the original text?

Answer: Concerning the sketch of the morals and the general name for it, one word or sentence will suffice. However, when it comes to the reasons for it, one word or sentence will never be enough to expound the beginning and the end, the essential and the accidental of it. Knowing the name of a concept without grasping the reasons for that name, it will incur unfavourable consequences, namely 'humanity' will be degraded into over-tolerance, 'respectfulness' will turn into flattering, 'filial piety' may ruin the father, and 'kindness' might spoil the son. Moreover one's adhering to 'faithfulness' will not necessarily prevent one from the kind of actions exemplified by Wei-sheng<sup>593</sup> and Bai-gong<sup>594</sup>. Let alone what listed in the commentary only gives an

<sup>593</sup> The young man Mr Wei insisted on waiting for his girlfriend under the bridge when the water was rising; finally he was drowned, due to the stubborn way in which he chose to keep his promise.

<sup>594</sup> Lord Bai insisted on revenge for his father's death regardless of the stability of the whole country.



example to illustrate that everything must have entailed in it an end where it is to finally rest upon. Besides, two of the cardinal morals are not even mentioned here. If one fails to extend it to other things so as to obtain a comprehensive understanding of it, there will be no way to exhaust all the principles under the Heaven.

**Q35.** 曰、復引淇澳之詩、何也。

**A35.** 曰、上言止於至善之理備矣。然其所以求之之方、與其得之之驗、則未之及。故又引此詩以發明之也。夫如切如磋、言其所以講於學者已精、而益求其精也。如琢如磨、言其所以脩於身者已密、而益求其密也。此其所以擇善固執、日就月將、而得止於至善之由也。恂慄者、嚴敬之存乎中也。威儀者、輝光之著乎外也。此其所以晬面盎背、施於四體、而爲止於至善之驗也。盛德至善、民不能忘、蓋人心之所同然。聖人既先得之、而其充盛宣著又如此。是以民皆仰之而不能忘也。盛德、以身之所得而言也。至善、以理之所極而言也。切磋琢磨、求其止於是而已矣。

**Question:** It is followed by another quotation of the poetry Qi-Yu, why?

**Answer:** What is said in the preceding phrase has fully illustrated the meaning of ‘reposing in the ultimate good’. However it has not touched upon the question why it is by that means we will achieve the ultimate goal, nor does it mention the manifest signals by which one’s attainment of that state could be verified. For that reason this poetry is quoted to further expound it. The metaphor of ‘cutting and filing’ means to say that one endeavours to perfect one’s learning after having mastered it; and that of ‘chiselling and polishing’ intends to show that one attempts to enhance one’s personal qualities despite having been through an elaborate procedure of self-cultivation. That is how one has attained the state of ultimate good through a long term of persistent accumulation of one’s effort in holding fast to goodness.

The manner of graveness signifies the inner solemnity; and the deportment of majesty manifests the brilliance of the light that is shining out. The inner brilliance, when it is so filling up and overflowing inside, would transform even the looks of the whole body-face, back and four limbs, whenever that occurs, it should be the sign of one’s accomplishment in the ultimate good. Such is the goodness of the great virtue that it cannot be forgotten by the people. Because all human beings share the same mind which has already been realised by the sages, through whom the greatness of the human mind becomes explicitly overflowing and prominent. Therefore people all look up to it and cannot forget it. The word ‘great virtue’ is adopted to describe one’s

accomplishment in self-cultivation, and that of ‘ultimate good’ indicates the Principle in the utmost sense, in which all the effort of ‘cutting, filing, chiselling and polishing’ aims to repose.

**Q36.** 曰、切磋琢磨、何以爲學問自脩之別。

**A36.** 曰、骨角脈理可尋而切磋之功易。所謂始條理之事也。玉石渾全堅確而琢磨之功難。所謂終條理之事也。

Question: For what reasons the effort of ‘cutting, filing’ is distinguished from that of ‘chiselling and polishing’, the former falls into the category of learning, the latter self-cultivation?

Answer: It is easier to cut and file the bone as it has veins to follow, hence the start of the work in searching for order; and it is more difficult to chisel and polish the jade as it is a solid and integrated mass, hence the end of it.

**Q37.** 曰、引烈文之詩、而言前王之沒世不忘何也。

**A37.** 曰、賢其賢者、聞而知之、仰其德業之盛也。親其親者、子孫保之、思其覆育之恩也。樂其樂者、含哺鼓腹而安其樂也。利其利者、耕田鑿井而享其利也。此皆先王盛德至善之餘澤、故雖已沒世、而人猶思之、愈久而不能忘也。上文之引淇澳、以明明德之得所止言之、而發新民之端也。此引烈文、以新民之得所止言之、而著明明德之效也。

Question: What is the reason for quoting the poetry of Lie Wen and saying that the former kings would not be forgotten throughout the generations?

Answer: A king, should he regard the worthies as worthy, his name would be heard and his great virtues and deeds be admired; should he love those who should be loved, he would be supported by the descendants; should he let people have delight in what is delightful, they would have life-nourishing food in their mouth and joyfully drum on their belly; should he make people benefit from what is beneficial, they would cultivate the land and dig well to enjoy the benefit of it. All these are the evidence of the gracious legacy of the former king due to his achievement in the great virtues and the ultimate good. That is why people miss him after he passed away, the longer he has gone, the better he would be remembered.

The quotation of the poetry *Qi Yu* in the preceding paragraph focuses on the point that the realisation of the enlightening virtue entails an end to rest upon, thereby initiate

the programme of renewing the people. And the poetry of *Lie Wen* being quoted here pertains to the accomplishment of renewing the people, so as to illustrate the effect of the realisation of the enlightening virtue.

**Q38.** 曰、淇澳烈文二節、鄭本元在誠意章後、而程子置之卒章之中。子獨何以知其不然而屬之此也。

**A38.** 曰、二家所繫文意不屬。故有不得而從者。且以所謂道盛德至善、沒世不忘者推之、則知其當屬乎此也。

Question: The two sections—*Qi-Yu* and *Lie-Wen*—are preceded by the chapter of sincerity of wills in Zheng's edition, and master Cheng locates them in the last chapter. How do you know that both are incorrect and you posit them here?

Answer: The two editions do not form a text that is of coherent meaning, therefore should not be followed. Moreover, from what is said about 'the great virtues and the ultimate good', and 'not being forgotten throughout generations', we know it is proper to put these two sections here.

**Q39.** 或問、聽訟一章、鄭本元在止於信之後、正心脩身之前。程子又進而寘之經文之下、此謂知之至也之上。子不之從、而寘之於此、何也。

**A39.** 曰、以傳之結語考之、則其爲釋本末之義可知矣。以經之本文乘之、則其當屬於此可見矣。二家之說有未安者。故不得而從也。

Question: The chapter of hearing litigation, in accordance with Zheng's edition, is preceded by 'end in faithfulness' and followed by the sections of rectifying the mind and self-cultivation. And master Cheng places it after the text of the scripture and before the sentence 'that is what is meant by having the knowledge extended to the utmost'. You do not follow that and put it here, why?

Answer: Referring to the conclusion of the commentary, we will see that that it is to explain the roots and the branches. Checking it with the text of scripture, we will understand that it undoubtedly fits here. Some defects are found in the two editions, thus cannot be followed.

**Q40.** 曰、然則聽訟無訟、於明德新民之義何所當也。

**A40.** 曰、聖人德盛仁熟、所以自明者皆極天下之至善。故能大有以畏服其民之心志、而使之不敢盡其無實之辭。是以雖其聽訟無以異於衆人、而自無訟之可聽。蓋己德既

明而民德自新、則得其本之明效也。或不能然、而欲區區於分爭辯訟之間、以求新民之效。其亦末矣。此傳者釋經之意也。

Question: But how could the phrase ‘to hear litigation yet have no litigation to be heard’ goes with the meaning of ‘resuming the virtue and renewing the people’?

Answer: The sages have cultivated their virtues and humanity to the full, and the reasons for their self-realisation will exhaust all the ultimate good under the Heaven. Therefore a sagely character will have the capacity to tame the mind of their people, so that the ordinary mass dare not to utter one single untruthful word. Although the way he hears litigation shows no difference from that of the ordinary people, there will naturally be no litigation to hear.

Once self-realisation is achieved, the virtues of the people will automatically be renewed, such is the evident effect of the realisation of the root or the essential. If that could not be accomplished, one will then intend to have the same effect of renewing the people by merely being engaged in disputes, arguments and litigations, which, is (dealing with) the branches. That is the author of the commentary meant to say in interpreting the scripture.

**Q41.** 曰、然則其不論夫終始者、何也。

**A41.** 曰、古人釋經、取其大畧。未必如是之屑屑也。且此章之下有闕文焉、又安知其非本有而并失之也耶。

Question: But the author does not mention the beginning and the end, why?

Answer: The ancients only attend to the main idea in their scriptural interpretation. They may not be so attentive to such trivial details. Besides, some passages are omitted in the following chapter, how would you know that it is not the case, meaning it initially existed in the text and was being lost later on?

**Q42.** 或問、此謂知本、其一爲聽訟章之結語、則聞命矣。其一鄭本元在經文之後此謂知之至也之前、而程子以爲衍文、何也。

**A42.** 曰、以其複出而他無所繫也。

Question: The sentence ‘that is what it means by knowing the essential’, in one case, serves as the conclusion of the chapter of hearing litigation, which means ‘to know the destiny’. In another case - in Zheng’s version, it appears between the text of the

scripture and the phrase ‘that is what it means by knowing to the utmost’. But master Cheng takes it as redundant words. Why?

Answer: Because it reappears and has nothing to associate with.

**Q43.** 曰、此謂知之至也、鄭本元隨此謂知本繫於經文之後、而下屬誠意之前。程子則去其上句之複、而附此句於聽訟知本之章、以屬明德之上。是必皆有說矣。子獨何据以知其皆不盡然、而有所取舍於其間耶。

**A43.** 曰、此無以他求爲也。考之經文、初無再論知本知至之云者、則知屬之經後者之不然矣。觀於聽訟之章既以知本結之、而其中間又無知至之說、則知再結聽訟者之不然矣。且其下文所屬明德之章、自當爲傳文之首。又安得以此而先之乎。故愚於此皆有所不能無疑者。獨程子上句之所刪、鄭氏下文之所屬、則以經傳之次求之而有合焉、是以不得而異也。

Question: The sentence ‘that is what is meant by knowing to the utmost’, in Zheng’s edition, is placed after the scriptural text together with ‘that is what is meant by knowing the essential’, and is followed by the chapter of ‘making wills sincere’<sup>595</sup>. Master Cheng deletes the repeated sentence and places it in the chapter of ‘hearing litigation and knowing the essential’, so that it precedes the chapter of ‘resuming the virtue’. There must be some reasons for the two editions. On what ground do you know that

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<sup>595</sup> With regard to the translation of *cheng yi* 誠意, there are a few points to be addressed: the meaning of *yi* 意 is twofold: will and thought. Not until Liu Zong-zhou had the twofold meaning of *yi* 意 been clarified. Liu makes a distinction between *yi* 意 will and *nian* 念 thought. The former serves as an ontological substance which is eternal and beyond changes and movements; the latter refers to the ever-changing flow of thoughts. In the work of Zhu Xi and Wang Yang-ming, we do not see such a distinction. That is precisely the cause of dispute between the two. Referring to the context of *Da Xue* 大學 *The Great Learning*, it is seen that Zhu Xi takes the step of *ge wu* 格物 the investigation of things as one that entails both the internal and external things, which implies that one ought to examine the thoughts in one’s mind and make sure they are free from prejudice and obsession, hence hold true. Therefore, the effort of making one’s thought truthful should be included in the first step, which can be related to the phrase *bu cheng wu wu* 不誠無物 in *Zhong Yong* 中庸 *The Doctrine of the Mean*, indicating a connection between truth and existence; it can be understood as ‘lacking truthfulness will lead to non-existence’. In general, Zhu Xi intends to show the importance of truthfulness, and stresses the seeking of truth in Confucian learning. By comparison, the effort of making the will sincere is of secondary importance. In other words, Zhu Xi makes the point that one has to know truth from falsity and right from wrong before one does self-reflection upon one’s will. Wang Yang-ming somehow plays down the sequence and blends the two together.

The complexity of this question makes it difficult to give an accurate translation of *cheng yi* 誠意. James Legge translates it as ‘make thoughts sincere’, whereas Wing Tsit Chan translates it as ‘making wills sincere’. Both use the word ‘sincere’ and they only differ as to the meaning of *yi* 意. My understanding is that by stressing the order of the steps in Confucian learning, Zhu Xi consciously gives truth priority over goodness; likewise he gives intellect priority over will, hence the truthful thought is prior to a sincere will. If we believe that keeping the thought truthful should be dealt with in the step of *ge wu* 格物, then *cheng yi* 誠意 is to be understood as ‘making wills sincere’ as Chan puts it in his translation. See Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton & New Jersey, 1969); James Legge’s translation of *The Great Learning*; and Tu Wei-ming, *Way, Learning and Politics* (Singapore, 1989).

neither of them is entirely correct and you take one bit and leave another according to your own judgement?

Answer: There is no other aim involved. Looking at the scriptural text, no discussion over ‘knowing the essential and knowing to the utmost’ is seen there, so we know that it is not appropriate to attach it to the text of scripture. As for the chapter of ‘hearing litigation’, insofar as it ends in ‘knowing the essential’ and has no saying of ‘knowing to the utmost’, we can see that it is not proper to link it with the section of ‘hearing litigation’. Besides, the following chapter of ‘resuming the virtue’ should be the start of the commentary text, how could it be preceded by this sentence? These are the places where I cannot withdraw my doubts. However, by referring to the order of the scriptural and commentary text, what master Cheng deletes and what is followed by in Zheng’s edition fit, so I have no disagreement on that respect.

**Q44.** 曰、然則子何以知其爲釋知至之結語、而又知其上之當有闕文也。

**A44.** 曰、以文義與下文推之、而知其釋知至也。以句法推之、而知其爲結語也。以傳之例推之、而知其有闕文也。

Question: On what ground do you know it is the closing sentence of the explanation of ‘knowing to the utmost’, and believe that there should be some omitted text preceding it?

Answer: According to the meaning and the context, we know that it is to explain ‘knowing to the ultimate’; according to the structure of the sentence, we know that it serves as a conclusion; according to the format of the commentary, we know that some text must have been omitted.

**Q45.** 曰、此經之序、自誠意以下其義明自傳悉矣。獨其所謂格物致知者字義不明、而傳復闕焉。且爲最初用力之地、而無復上文語緒之可尋也。子乃自謂取程子之意以補之、則程子之言何以見其必合於經意、而子之言又似不盡出於程子何耶。

**A45.** 曰、或問於程子曰、學何爲而可以有覺也。程子曰、學莫先於致知。能致其知、則思日益明、至於久而後有覺爾。書所謂思曰睿、睿作聖、董子所謂勉強學問、則聞見博而智益明、正謂此也。學而無覺、則亦何以學爲也哉。或問、忠信則可勉矣、而致知爲難奈何。程子曰、誠敬固不可以不勉。然天下之理不先知之、亦未有能勉以行之者也。故大學之序先致知而後誠意。其等有不可躡者。苟無聖人之聰明睿知、而徒欲勉焉以踐其行事之迹、則亦安能如彼之動容周旋無不中禮也哉。惟其燭理之明、乃能不待勉強而自樂循理爾。夫人之性本無不善。循理而行宜無難者。惟其知之不至、

而但欲以力爲之。是以苦其難而不知其樂耳。知之而至、則循理爲樂、不循理爲不樂。何苦而不循理以害吾樂耶。昔嘗見有談虎傷人者、衆莫不聞、而其間一人神色獨變。問其所以、乃嘗傷於虎者也。夫虎能傷人、人孰不知。然聞之有懼有不懼者、知之有真有不真也。學者之知道、必如此人之知虎、然後爲至耳。若曰知不善之不可爲而猶或爲之、則亦未嘗真知而已矣。此兩條者、皆言格物致知所以當先而不可後之意也。又有問進脩之術何先者。程子曰、莫先於正心誠意。然欲誠意、必先致知。而欲致知、又在格物。致、盡也。格、至也。凡有一物必有一理。窮而至之、所謂格物者也。然而格物亦非一端。如或讀書講明道義、或論古今人物而別其是非、或應接事物而處其當否、皆窮理也。曰、格物者、必物物而格之耶。將止格一物而萬理皆通耶。曰、一物格而萬理通、雖顏子亦未至此。唯今日而格一物焉、明日又格一物焉、積習既多、然後脫然有貫通處耳。又曰、自一身之中以至萬物之理、理會得多、自當豁然有箇覺處。又曰、窮理者、非謂必盡窮天下之理。又非謂止窮得一理便到。但積累多後、自當脫然有悟處。又曰、格物、非欲盡窮天下之物。但於一事上窮盡、其他可以類推。至於言孝、則當求其所以爲孝者如何。若一事上窮不得、且別窮一事。或先其易者、或先其難者、各隨人淺深。譬如千蹊萬徑皆可以適國。但得一道而入、則可以推類而通其餘矣。蓋萬物各具一理、而萬理同出一原。此所以可推而無不通也。又曰、物必有理、皆所當窮。若天地之所以高深、鬼神之所以幽顯、是也。若曰天吾知其高而已矣、地吾知其深而已矣、鬼神吾知其幽且顯而已矣、則是已然之詞、又何理之可窮哉。又曰、如欲爲孝、則當知所以爲孝之道。如何而爲奉養之宜、如何而爲溫清之節。莫不窮究、然後能之。非獨守夫孝之一字而可得也。或問、觀物察己者、豈因見物而反求諸己乎。曰、不必然也。物我一理、纔明彼卽曉此。此合內外之道也。語其大天地之所以高厚、語其小至一物之所以然、皆學者所宜致思也。曰、然則先求之四端可乎。曰、求之情性、固切於身。然一草一木亦皆有理、不可不察。又曰、致知之要、當知至善之所在。如父止於慈、子止於孝之類。若不務此而徒欲汎然以觀萬物之理、則吾恐其如大軍之遊騎、出太遠而無所歸也。又曰、格物莫若察之於身。其得之尤切。此九條者、皆言格物致知所當用力之地、與其次第工程也。又曰、格物窮理、但立誠意以格之。其遲速則在乎人之明暗耳。又曰、入道莫如敬。未有能致知而不在敬者。又曰、涵養須用敬。進學則在致知。又曰、致知在乎所養。養知莫過於寡欲。又曰、格物者、適道之始。思欲格物、則固已近道矣。是何也。以收其心而不放也。此五條者、又言涵養本原之功、所以爲格物致知之本者也。凡程子之爲說者不過如此。其於格物致知之傳詳矣。今也尋其義理既無可疑、考其字義亦皆有據。至以他書論之、則文言所謂學聚問辨、中庸所謂明善擇善、孟子所謂知性知天、又皆在乎固守力行之先、而

可以驗夫大學始教之功爲有在乎此也。愚嘗反覆考之而有以信其必然。是以竊取其意以補傳文之闕。不然、則又安敢犯不韙之罪、爲無證之言、以自託於聖經賢傳之間乎。

Question: In this text the meaning of the whole scriptural preface is clear except the part preceding the section of 'making wills sincere'. That means only the literal meaning of the words-'investigation of things and extension of knowledge' is ambiguous, and it happens that this part is not seen in the commentary. Besides, it is the first step of self-cultivation and there is no preceding text to fall back on. Thereby you provide a *Supplement* to it and claim that your *Supplement* is according with the idea of master Cheng. How do you know that the words of master Cheng will necessarily match the original meaning of the scripture? And what you have said does not seem to be entirely derived from master Cheng, why?

Answer: When being asked by what kind of learning one will achieve self-realisation, master Cheng answered that nothing is prior to the extension of knowledge so far as learning goes. If one is able to extend one's knowledge, one's thinking will be more illuminated day by day and self-realisation be attained after a long term of accumulation. It is said in the *Book of Odes* that thinking implies illumination, and illumination leads to sageliness. That is what Master Dong meant to say when addressing the point that by through arduous endeavour, one will become erudite and more illuminative. If learning does not bring about self-realisation, what is the point of doing it?

Someone posed the question to master Cheng—Loyalty and faithfulness might be achieved through effort, what to do if one encounters difficulty in extending the knowledge? He answered: of course one should make effort in achieving sincerity/truthfulness and conscientiousness. However, if one does not foremost know the principles under Heaven, there is no chance of trying to put it into practice. Therefore according to the order of the great learning, one must firstly extend the knowledge and then make the will sincere. These steps are not to be skipped over. If one is not as intelligent and illuminative as a sage, yet intends to merely emulate the action of a sage, how would he be so flexible and spontaneous as a sage and never fail to accord with propriety? Only when one holds the light of the Principle will he be able to have delight in observing the Principle without much effort. Since the nature of man is originally good, it should not be hard to act in accordance with the Principle. However, only because one fails to extend the knowledge to the utmost in the first place, and intend to achieve it solely through effort, therefore one finds it difficult and does not



know the pleasure in doing so. Once the knowledge is extended to the utmost, it will be joyful to observe the Principle and be painful if one does otherwise. Should that be the case, why would I deprive myself of the pleasure in observing the Principle? I saw one person talking about how a tiger attacked human, among the audience only one person reacted with a change in his expression. The reason for that reaction is because he used to be harmed by a tiger. Everyone knows that tiger can harm human beings, but some respond it with heartfelt fear, others do not show that sense of fear; similarly some may have obtained the knowledge in a genuine and unaffected way, others may not. One who is engaged in learning must know the Way to the same extent as the man who knows the tiger, only then will his knowledge reach the utmost. If one says he knows doing evil is not right yet still does it occasionally, then he surely does not know what he is saying. Both intend to illustrate that the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge should be prior rather than posterior to other programs.

When being asked what practical effort should be given priority when it comes to self-cultivation, master Cheng answered that nothing should be prior to that of rectifying the mind and making the will sincere. However, in order to keep the will sincere, one has to extend the knowledge; in order to extend the knowledge, one has to investigate things. To extend means to exhaust, to investigate means to reach. If there is one thing, there will be one principle in it, hence the investigation of things is meant to exhaust and reach the Principle. However, the ways to investigate things vary. For instance, reading books and lecturing on moral truth; talking about the characters of past and present and making a distinction between their right and wrong doings; or responding to the surroundings and dealing with the appropriateness as well as the inappropriateness of things, all these are practice of probing the Principle.

When being asked whether the investigation of things means that things must be investigated one by one, or suggests that by investigating one thing the other ten thousand will be understood all together, Master Cheng answered that the investigation of one thing will bring about the comprehension of ten thousand principles indicates a state that even Confucius's favourite disciple Yan Hui falls short.

The only feasible way is to investigate one thing today, and another thing tomorrow, after a long period of accumulation will a breakthrough be made all on a sudden. He also said that from what is contained in an individual's personal life to the principles of ten thousand things, the more one understands, the more likely a sudden self – realisation will dawn on him.

Moreover, he mentioned that the investigation of things does not mean to investigate all things under the Heaven, but to investigate one thing to the utmost, and the others will be known analogically. Taking ‘filial piety’ as an example, one has to seek for the reason why it should be observed. If one cannot exhaust a principle through one thing, then let him move on to something else. One may start with what is easy or alternatively with what is hard, all depend on personal situation, just like there are thousand or ten thousand routes leading to the country, so once you have got access to one path, the others will also be accessible through analogy. Because each of the ten thousand things possesses one Principle, and the ten principles are derived from one source. That is why each one is connected with all the others and one could be known analogically through the other.

On top of that, he said there must be a principle inhering in each thing, and all of the principles should be probed, such as why the heaven is so high and the earth so deep, and why the ghosts are dusky and the spirits illustrious. If one is content with simply knowing that the sky is high and the earth deep, the ghosts and the spirits dusky and illustrious, then he is only repeating what has been said, there is no principle to be probed in that case.

What’s more, he said, if one wants to put filial piety into practice, one should know the means of and the reason for such doing. For instance, what is the most appropriate manner to look after your parents, how to take into consideration the comfort of your parents—to keep them warm in winter and cool in summer. After having all these investigated to the utmost, one will then be able to do it. Being merely attached to the word ‘filial piety’ will never suffice.

Someone asked master Cheng, with regard to the observation of things and self-reflection, whether it is true that one turns to self-reflection only because he sees things under his eyes. He said it is not necessarily so. Things share one Principle with me. To know one thing will naturally lead to the understanding of another, which is the way of integrating the external with the internal. A learner should ponder upon all the reasons ranging from why the heaven is high and the earth deep to why a small thing is the way it is.

Someone asked master Cheng— is it proper to start from reflecting on the four beginnings? He answered: with regard to sentiment and nature, of course it should be sought through personal experience. However, the Principle is also inhering in every single grass and tree, which ought not to be neglected.

He also said that the key to the extension of knowledge is to understand where the ultimate good lies, such as being a father should repose in kindness and being a son in filial piety. If one fails to dwell on this and intends to generally observe the principles of the ten thousand things, he is probably behaving like a wandering army which has gone too far to find the way home. And there is no better ways to investigate things than self-reflection, whatever one learns by that will bears the particular meaning of one's personal experience.

The aforementioned nine points all indicate the areas in which one should make endeavours to investigate things and extend knowledge, it also spells out the procedure of this project.

In addition he said that concerning the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge, once one sets his heart on it with sincerity, he will get there sooner or later, depending on how intelligent he is. And the entrance to the Way is no more than conscientiousness, no one will be able to extend knowledge without being conscientious. The key to moral cultivation lies in conscientiousness whereas the key to advancing learning lies in the extension of knowledge; whereas to extend knowledge depends upon how to nourish the root, and the way to nourish the root and to extend knowledge is no more than refraining from desire.

The investigation of things indicates the beginning of one's attainment of the Way. If one intends to investigate things, he is already close to the Way. Why? Because he withdraws his mind and does not allow it to be scattered. All the five aforementioned points are concerned with the effort in nourishing the root or the source, therefore implying the essential elements of the investigation of things.

That would cover the teaching of master Cheng, which is fully expounded in *the Commentary on the Investigation of Things*. Now I find no doubt in checking the idea and logic of it, and by examining the meaning of the words I see that it is well-grounded. As for its relevance to other books, we can list the saying of 'learning, congregating, discussing, and debating' in *The Commentary* (on the text of Qian diagram), the expression of 'knowing and choosing the good' in *The Doctrine of the Mean*, and that of 'knowing nature and the Heaven' in *The Book of Mencius*, all address and adhere to the initial significance of man's endeavour which, is also verified by the first instruction of the great learning whose focus lies in the same area. I once studied it time and again and now I believe it is certainly and necessarily so. Hence adopt his view to supplement the omitted text of commentary. How dare I commit the offence of using his name, utter

groundless words and proclaim myself to be standing between the sacred scripture and the worthy commentary otherwise?

**Q46.** 曰、然則吾子之意、亦可得而悉聞之乎。

**A46.** 曰、吾聞之也。天道流行、造化發育。凡有聲色貌象而盈於天地之間者、皆物也。既有是物、則其所以爲是物者、莫不各有當然之則而自不容已。是皆得於天之所賦、而非人之所能爲也。今且以其至切而近者言之、則心之爲物實主於身。其體則有仁義禮智之性、其用則有惻隱·羞惡·恭敬·是非之情、渾然在中、隨感而應、各有攸主而不可亂也。次而及於身之所具、則有口鼻耳目四支之用、又次而及於身之所接、則有君臣·父子·夫婦·長幼·朋友之常。是皆必有當然之則而自不容已。所謂理也。外而至於人、則人之理不異於己也。遠而至於物、則物之理不異於人也。極其大、則天地之運、古今之變、不能外也。盡於小、則一塵之微、一息之頃、不能遺也。是乃上帝所降之衷、烝民所秉之彝、劉子所謂天地之中、夫子所謂性與天道、子思所謂天命之性、孟子所謂仁義之心、程子所謂天然自有之中、張子所謂萬物之一原、邵子所謂道之形體者。但其氣質有清濁偏正之殊、物欲有淺深厚薄之異。是以人之與物、賢之與愚、相與懸絕而不能同耳。以其理之同、故以一人之心而於天下萬物之理無不能知。以其稟之異、故於其理或有所不能窮也。理有未窮。故其知有不盡。知有不盡、則其心之所發、必不能純於義理、而無雜乎物欲之私。此其所以意有不誠、心有不正、身有不脩、而天下國家不可得而治也。昔者聖人蓋有憂之。是以於其始教、爲之小學而使之習於誠敬、則所以收其放心養其德性者、已無所不用其至矣。及其進乎大學、則又使之卽夫事物之中、因其所知之理、推而究之以各到乎其極、則吾之知識亦得以周遍精切而無不盡也。若其用力之方、則或考之事爲之著、或察之念慮之微、或求之文字之中、或索之講論之際、使於身心性情之德、人倫日用之常、以至天地鬼神之變、鳥獸草木之宜、自其一物之中、莫不有以見其所當然而不容已、與其所以然而不可易者、必其表裏精粗無所不盡、而又益推其類以通之、至於一日脫然而貫通焉、則於天下之物、皆有以究其義理精微之所極、而吾之聰明睿智、亦皆有以極其心之本體而無不盡矣。此愚之所以補乎本傳闕文之意、雖不能盡用程子之言、然其指趣要歸、則不合者鮮矣。讀者其亦深考而實識之哉。

**Question:** May I have the chance of hearing the whole lot of your own idea?

**Answer:** According to what I have heard, the ever-moving cosmic power creates and sustains. Whatever assumes sound, colour and form and fills up the space between the heaven and the earth, are called things. So far as a thing exists, there will be the reason

for its being such a thing which entails the rules of necessity that cannot be suspended. These are all granted by Heaven and cannot be achieved through man's effort.

As far as the most direct and the closest is concerned, the mind as a thing serves the purpose of commanding the body, whose substance consists in the nature of humaneness, righteousness, propriety and wisdom and whose function consists in the feeling of sympathy, shamefulness, respectfulness and the sense of assent or dissent. All blend intrinsically into one and each serves its own function orderly and gives response accordingly.

The next closest thing will be what the body possesses which indicates the function of mouth, nose, ears, eyes and the four limbs. The next will then be what the body has contact with, thereby arise the relationships between lord and subject, father and son, husband and wife, the elder and the younger, and friends. All entail the rules of necessity which cannot be suspended, and that is the so-called Principle.

Externally speaking, it reaches to other people, so the Principle of others does not differ from that of mine; talking from afar, the Principle of things does not differ from that of human. Concerning the maximum of it, the running of the universe and the change between the ancient and the present are all included; concerning the minimum of it, a thing as tiny as a dust and a moment as short as a breath will not be excluded. That is the bliss granted by the Heaven and the virtue with which man is endowed. It also indicates what master Liu means by being placed in the middle between heaven and earth; what Confucius calls nature and the way of heaven, the nature of the Heavenly decree by Zisi; the awareness of humaneness and righteousness by Mencius; the inborn mean by master Cheng; the one origin of ten thousand things by master Zhang; and the form and body of the Way by master Shao.

However, when it comes to the cosmic matter each individual thing is endowed with, the distinction will arise which separates the pure from the impure, and the fair from the deflected; insofar as the material desire goes, there will be some differences between the shallow and the deep-rooted, or between the thick and the thin. Hence the irremovable distance between man and things, and between the worthy and the ignorant.

On account of the same Principle, there will be no principle of things in the world that cannot be known by the mind of each individual person. But due to the difference lying in the cosmic matter that each thing is endowed with, one may not be able to probe the Principle of things. Because the Principle is not probed, the knowledge is not comprehensive; because the knowledge is not comprehensive, what issues from the

mind will not be the Principle in its entirety, but will be mixed with one's selfish material desire. So long as the will is not sincere, the mind is not rectified, the self not cultivated, and the state and the world not properly governed.

The ancient sages already had concerns for that, thus the education system was established. It starts with the elementary learning in which students are to be engaged in cultivating the habit of being sincere and conscientious, so that the scattered mind will be drawn back and the virtue be nourished. Throughout the elementary education this kind of effort is to be made to the best of one's ability. As one advances into the great learning, he will be taught to have contact with things and extend his knowledge from what he has known to what is yet to know, until the ultimate is achieved. In so doing, one's knowledge will become comprehensive, precise and complete.

As for the means, one may investigate the clear evidence of an affair, or examine the subtle trace of the thoughts, or seek it in the written words, or find it through discussing and lecturing, so as to grasp the rules of necessity that cannot be suspended and the reasons of causality that cannot be changed under whatever circumstances, be it concerning the attributes of one's body, mind and temperament, or the common rules for the daily inter-personal relationship, even the miraculous change of heaven and earth or the natural law for the birds and beasts, the grasses and trees. It must proceed to the extent that the external and the internal, the refined and the crude are to be fully explored, and further extend it to know others in an analogical manner. A breakthrough will be made one day and the dawn of enlightenment will suddenly occur, as a result, the principles of things in the world will be thoroughly investigated to the utmost, and my intelligence will then exhaust the whole substance of the mind. That is the reason for my writing *Supplement* to the commentary. Although it does not entirely adopt master Cheng's own words, the main idea of it is hardly incompatible with his view. That should be thoroughly explored and understood.

**Q47.** 曰、然則子之爲學、不求諸心而求諸迹、不求之內而求之外。吾恐聖賢之學不如是之淺近而支離也。

**A47.** 曰、人之所以爲學、心與理而已矣。心雖主乎一身、而其體之虛靈足以管乎天下之理。理雖散在萬物、而其用之微妙實不外乎一人之心、初不可以內外精粗而論也。然或不知此心之靈而無以存之、則昏昧雜擾而無以窮衆理之妙。不知衆理之妙而無以窮之、則偏狹固滯而無以盡此心之全。此其理勢之相須、蓋亦有必然者。是以聖人設

教、使人默識此心之靈、而存之於端莊靜一之中、以爲窮理之本、使人知有衆理之妙、而窮之於學問思辨之際、以致盡心之功。巨細相涵、動靜交養、初未嘗有內外精粗之擇。及其真積力久而豁然貫通焉、則亦有以知其渾然一致、而果無內外精粗之可言矣。今必以是爲淺近支離、而欲藏形匿影、別爲一種幽深恍惚艱難阻絕之論、務使學者莽然措其心於文字言語之外、而曰道必如此、然後可以得之、則是近世佛學詖淫邪遁之尤者、而欲移之以亂古人明德新民之實學。其亦誤矣。

“Question: Your method of learning seems to be seeking truth in the visible traces rather than in your mind, resorting to the external instead of the internal. I am afraid the learning of the sages should by no means appear as superficial and fragmented as yours. Answer: What one seeks in his learning, is nothing but mind and Principle. Although the mind seems to serve as the commander of the body, its intelligence does possess the power to grasp all the principles under the Heaven in terms of its substance. Whereas Principle is pervading in ten thousands of things, its subtle and miraculous function consists in each individual mind. Thus fundamentally speaking, it is not appropriate to attribute the external to Principle and the internal to the mind, nor is it justified to classify one as the refined, the other as the crude.

However, the one who is not aware of the intelligence of the mind, will under no circumstance probe the wonder of the principles due to the disordered and scattered condition of his mind. Should one fail to have a glimpse of the wonder of the principles and makes no attempt to probe it, one will remain stubborn and narrow-minded and the power of mind will never be fulfilled. Thus Principle and mind depend upon each other.

Based on the above understanding, the sages, in establishing their teachings, always on the one hand lead one to be aware of the intelligence of mind, to preserve it in his civility, quietness, and concentration, and to take it as his substantial ability to probe the principles; on the other hand, lead one to believe the existence of the wonder of the principles, and then seek for it in intellectual inquiries and discussions so as to exhaust the function of the mind. In that sense, the explicit is contained in the implicit, the animated is nurtured in tranquillity, and vice versa. There is no need to initially distinguish the external from the internal, or make a choice between the refined and the crude. After one gradually accumulates one's efforts to a certain point, one will see the unity of mind and Principle and realise there is no such thing as the division between the internal and the external, between the refined and the crude.

Should one insist to regard this method of learning as superficial and fragmented, and intend to advocate another kind of learning which is devoid of forms and shapes, and seems to be profound, sophisticated and inaccessible, the one who is to take up this kind of learning will be taught to dwell on the realm to which no human language can obtain access. Those who keep saying that ‘you must seek for truth in this way so that you may get there one day’ are the followers of Buddhism nowadays. Such is the harm of their heretical doctrine that it will ruin the real learning practised by the ancients whose purpose of learning lies only in the realisation of the enlightening virtue and in edifying and caring for the people.

**Q48.** 曰、近世大儒有爲格物致知之說者。曰、格猶扞也。禦也。能扞禦外物、而後能知至道也。又有推其說者。曰、人生而靜、其性本無不善。而有爲不善者、外物誘之也。所謂格物以致其知者、亦曰、扞去外物之誘、而本然之善自明耳。是其爲說、不亦善乎。

**A48.** 曰、天生烝民、有物有則、則物之與道固未始相離也。今曰禦外物而後可以知至道、則是絕父子而後可以知孝慈、離君子而後可以知仁敬也。是安有此理哉。若曰所謂外物者不善之誘耳、非指君臣父子而言也、則夫外物之誘人、莫甚於飲食男女之欲。然推其本、則固亦莫非人之所當有而不能無者也。但於其間自有天理人欲之辨、而不可以毫釐差耳。惟其徒有是物、而不能察於吾之所以行乎其間者、孰爲天理、孰爲人欲、是以無以致其克復之功、而物之誘於外者、得以奪乎天理之本然也。今不卽物以窮其原、而徒惡物之誘乎己、乃欲一切扞而去之、則是必閉口枵腹、然後可以得飲食之正、絕滅種類、然後可以全夫婦之別也。是雖裔戎無君無父之教、有不能充其說者。況乎聖人大中至正之道、而得以此亂之哉。

**Question:** A distinguished Confucian scholar in our time gives his interpretation of the investigation of things. To investigate, according to him, is to defend or resist, meaning one will be able to know the ultimate way after having resisted the external things. Some pushes his saying one step further and holds that man is born to be quiescent, and his nature is nothing but good, the evil doing is caused by the temptation of the external things. Thus the so-called ‘investigating things in order to extend knowledge’ is interpreted as resisting the temptation of the external things and the inborn good nature will naturally be revealed as a result. Isn’t that also kind of proper interpretation?

**Answer:** When the Heaven gives birth to the mass people, both things and rules arise. Thus from the very beginning there has never been a time that things and the Way are



separated. Now if one says that resisting things will lead to knowing the ultimate Way, which means one has to firstly forsake the relationship between father and son in order to know the morals of filial piety and kindness, or to abandon gentleman so as to know the meaning of humaneness and conscientiousness. How could that be sensible?

If one believes that the external things only refer to the evil temptations with no relevance to the relationships between lord and subject, or father and son, then we have to admit that none is more irresistible than the desire for food and the lust for sex as far as the temptations of the external things are concerned. Once we look into the root of such desire, we will find that it is no more than something that human beings should inherit and cannot do away with.

Nevertheless, there is naturally a distinction between the heavenly Principle and the human desire which, ought to be grasped without even a tiny bit of deviation. If one merely knows there are the external things, yet fails to understand the reason for one's being entangled with them, and to detect which one pertains to the heavenly Principle and which one to the human desire, then he will fall short to restrain his selfish desire and to conform to propriety, thereby the external temptation will overshadow the original state of the heavenly Principle.

Now if one fails to approach the things and to investigate the source of them, but simply loathes the temptation of them and intends to resist and get rid of them all together, then he has to shut his mouth and empty his stomach in order to gain the proper way of eating; one has to make the species extinct so as to perfect the distinction between man and woman. This kind of teaching cannot even be accepted by the barbarians whose doctrine denies both king and father, let alone being approved by the great, the most appropriate Way of the sages, one should under no circumstance be perplexed by this sort of interpretation.

**Q49.** 曰、自程子以格物爲窮理、而其學者傳之、見於文字多矣。是亦有以發其師說而有助於後學者耶。

**A49.** 曰、程子之說、切於己而不遺於物、本於行事之實而不廢文字之功、極其大而不畧其小、究其精而不忽其粗。學者循是而用力焉、則既不務博而陷於支離、亦不徑約而流於狂妄。既不舍其積累之漸、而其所謂豁然貫通者、又非見聞思慮之可及也。是於說經之意、入德之方、其亦可謂反復詳備而無俟於發明矣。若其門人、雖曰祖其師說、然以愚考之、則恐其皆未足以及此也。蓋有以必窮萬物之理同出於一爲格物、知

萬物同出乎一理爲知至、如合內外之道、則天人物我爲一、通晝夜之道、則死生幽明爲一、達哀樂好惡之情、則人與鳥獸魚鼈爲一、求屈伸消長之變、則天地山川草木爲一者似矣。然其欲必窮萬物之理而專指外物、則於理之在己者有不明矣。但求衆物比類之同、而不究一物性情之異、則於理之精微者有不察矣。不欲其異而不免乎四說之異、必欲其同而未極乎一原之同、則徒有牽合之勞、而不睹貫通之妙矣。其於程子之說何如哉。又有以爲窮理只是尋箇是處。然必以恕爲本、而又先其大者、則一處理通而觸處皆通者。其曰尋箇是處者、則得矣。而曰以恕爲本、則是求仁之方、而非窮理之務也。又曰先其大者、則不若先其近者之切也。又曰一處通而一切通、則又顏子之所不能及、程子之所不敢言、非若類推積累之可以循序而必至也。又有以爲天下之物不可勝窮。然皆備於我而非從外得也。所謂格物亦曰、反身而誠、則天下之物無不在我者、是亦似矣。然反身而誠、乃爲物格知至以後之事。言其窮理之至無所不盡、故凡天下之理、反求諸身、皆有以見其如目視耳聽手持足行之畢具於此、而無毫髮之不實耳。固非以是方爲格物之事、亦不謂但務反求諸身、而天下之理、自然無不誠也。中庸之言明善、卽物格知至之事。其言誠身、卽意誠心正之功。故不明乎善、則有反諸身而不誠者、其功夫地位固有序而不可誣矣。今爲格物之說、又安得遽以是而爲言哉。又有以今日格一物、明日格一物爲非程子之言者、則諸家所記程子之言、此類非一。不容皆誤。且其爲說、正中庸學問思辨弗得弗措之事、無所拂於理者、不知何所病而疑之也。豈其習於持敬之約、而厭夫觀理之煩耶。抑直以己所未聞而不信他人之所聞耶。夫持敬觀理不可偏廢。程子固已言之。若以己偶未聞而遂不之信、則以有子之似聖人、而速貧速朽之論、猶不能無待於子游而後定、今又安得遽以一人之所未聞、而盡廢衆人之所共聞者哉。又有以爲物物致察而宛轉歸己、如察天行以自強、察地勢以厚德者、亦似矣。然其曰物物致察、則是不察程子所謂不必盡窮天下之物也。又曰宛轉歸己、則是不察程子所謂物我一理、纔明彼卽曉此之意也。又曰察天行以自強、察地勢以厚德、則是但欲因其已定之名、擬其已著之迹、而未嘗如程子所謂求其所以然、與其所以爲者之妙也。獨有所謂卽事卽物、不厭不棄、而身親格之以精其知者、爲得致字向裏之意。而其曰格之之道、必立志以定其本、居敬以持其志、志立乎事物之表、敬行乎事物之內、而知乃可精者、又有以合乎所謂未有致知而不在敬者之指。但其語意頗傷急迫、既不能盡其全體規模之大、又無以見其從容潛玩積久貫通之功耳。嗚呼、程子之言、其答問反復之詳且明也、如彼、而其門人之所以爲說者、乃如此。雖或僅有一二之合焉、而不免於猶有所未盡也。是亦不待七十子喪而大義已乖矣。尙何望其能有所發、而有助於後學哉。閒獨惟念、昔聞延平先生之教。以爲、爲學之初、且當常存此心、勿爲他事所勝。凡遇一事、卽當且就此事反復推尋以究其理、待此一

事融釋脫落、然後循序少進而別窮一事。如此既久、積累之多、胸中自當有洒然處。非文字言語之所及也。詳味此言、雖其規模之大、條理之密、若不逮於程子、然其功夫之漸次、意味之深切、則有非他說所能及者。惟嘗實用力於此者、爲能有以識之。未易以口舌爭也。

Question: Ever since master Cheng interpreted the investigation of things as probing the Principle, his pupils have provided various comments on it, which are widely seen in written books. Is there anyone who has developed his master's teaching, which may offer some help to the learners of coming generations?

Answer: Master Cheng's teaching is close to oneself without neglecting things; based upon the genuine capacity for praxis without forsaking the effect of the written words; reaches the mighty parts without ignoring the minor bits; probes into the refined without overlooking the crude. If one advances one's learning in this way, he will not fall into the trap of focusing on eruditeness yet being stuck on the fragmented opinions, nor will he cling to simplicity and slip into arrogance and ignorance as a result. He will not abolish the effort of gradual accumulation, and what he means by the dawn of a thorough knowledge all of a sudden, is not to be obtained by one's sense of seeing and hearing. With regard to the meaning of scripture and the approach to moral virtues, it is justified to say that master Cheng has fully reiterated everything with details, his idea thus does not await any further expounding. As for the disciples, despite their claiming to have followed the master's steps, I am afraid none of them has qualified himself for such a claim, according to my own research on this matter.

Some hold that the investigation of things means one must probe the same one source of the principles of ten thousand things; and the extension of knowledge means to know the ten thousand things are all derived from the same one Principle. For instance, by integrating the internal with the external, [one will see that] Heaven and human, things and myself are one; by comprehending the way that is running through the day and the night, [one will see that] life and death, light and darkness are one; by obtaining a thorough knowledge of the sentiments such as sorrow and joy, loving and loathing, [one will see that] human, birds, beasts, fish and tortoise are one; by exploring the fluctuation between bending and stretching, decline and growth [one will see that] heaven and earth, mountain and river, grass and tree are one, etc. Here when the necessity of probing the principles of the ten thousand things is stressed, it exclusively refers to the external things, thus the intrinsic principle lying in oneself is not being illuminated. It merely

focuses on the analogical similarity of the multitude things, yet fails to examine the distinctive nature and attribute of each individual thing, thus the delicacy and subtlety of the Principle is to be somehow neglected. It wants no difference yet cannot be free from the differences within the four theories [developed by the four prominent disciples]; it intends to drive all into similarity yet fails to attain the oneness of the same origin. Hence it is simply a futile attempt to forge far-fetched interpretation without glimpsing the beauty of a thorough comprehension of all. What do you think of it in comparison with master Cheng's teaching?

Some believe that the effort of probing the Principle is nothing but to find the spot in which lies the right or the good; and it must be grounded on self-extension and start with the big issues. In that sense once a thorough understanding of one thing is achieved, all the others will be understood likewise. What he says about finding the spot where lies the right or the good indicates the state of fulfilment; whereas his announcement that taking self-extension as the very foundation, suggests the means to fulfil the virtue of humaneness, which does not pertain to the matter of probing the Principle. He also says that to begin with things at hand is more applicable to an individual's personal case than to start from the big issues. And he declares that a thorough understanding of one thing will lead to the comprehension of all things. Having claimed as thus he seems to be suggesting something that even master Yan falls short and master Cheng dare not give voice to. His theory therefore differs from the kind of effort to extend and accumulate [one's knowledge], which could be carried out by following an orderly procedure, and would certainly lead one to the state of fulfilment.

Some believe that although things in the world cannot be completely probed, nonetheless they are entirely possessed within me, thus should not be acquired from without. With regard to the investigation of things, he says that by introspecting one's self, sincerity is to be achieved, thus there will be no single thing in the world that is not inherent in me. That seems to be right. However, the kind of sincerity obtained by introspection indicates the state after things are investigated and knowledge extended. It is said [in the book of Mencius] that after probing the Principle to the extent that all things are fully investigated, the state will be attained that all of the principles in the world will become nothing but total reality; it is so real to me just as my seeing with my own eyes, hearing with my own ears, holding with my own hands and walking with my own feet, once I turn around to seek it within myself. But the aforementioned statement shows no reference to the program of the investigation of things, nor does it

suggest that by being utterly engaged in introspection, all the principles in the world will automatically be realised. The statement of illuminating the goodness in The Doctrine of the Mean is talking about the matter when things are investigated and knowledge extended; and the saying as to one's personal sincerity is to discuss the result of one's effort in making the will sincere and having the mind rectified. If the goodness is not being firstly illuminated, then the sincerity will not be fully realised by introspection. Therefore the effort of this kind should be made according to the right order, which ought not to be altered at random. How can it be justified if a theory is formulated on the basis of such a [defective] interpretation of the investigation of things?

Some have doubt as to the saying 'to investigate one thing today, and another thing tomorrow', and does not believe it is said by master Cheng. But according to the various versions of the transcription of master Cheng's words, this sort of statement occurs more than once, it cannot be that they are all mistaken on it. Besides, this is precisely what is stated in The Doctrine of the Mean concerning the matter of 'learning, questioning, thinking and distinguishing' and that of 'never stop until the goal is achieved'; and it shows no contradiction to the Principle. I have no idea what is wrong with this theory and what is the cause of his doubt. Is it due to the fact that he is so used to the simplicity of adhering to conscientiousness that he becomes sick and tired of the complexity of observing the principles [of things]? Or is it because he has never heard about it so that he does not believe that it had been known by others? Undoubtedly master Cheng had made it clear that neither the effort in adhering to conscientiousness nor the observation of the principles [of things] should be abolished. It cannot be sensible if one does not believe something simply because he happened not to have heard about it. Even a person who is so much like a sage such as You Zi [有子] cannot make up his mind without the help of Ziyu [子游], with regard to the discussion over Confucius's saying that he would rather see one is poor in funeral and would like the body to be perished very soon. How could it be justified if one intends to scrap something that had already been heard by many others, just because he himself is not informed of it?

Some hold the view that to apply the effort of investigation to one thing after another will lead up to [knowing] oneself, [which will be performed] in a roundabout way. For instance, to observe the operation of heaven aims to reinforce self-perseverance, or to explore the topography of the earth is in purpose of deepening one's virtue, which seems to be a sound theory. However, by saying that every single thing is to be

investigated, he has overlooked master Cheng's view that it is not necessary to exhaust all things in the world. By claiming that in a roundabout way one resumes one's self, he has missed master Cheng's point that there is one Principle between things and oneself, hence the understanding of things will lead to the illumination of oneself. In addition, his theory such as observing the operation of heaven so as to reinforce self-perseverance, or exploring the topography of the earth in order to deepen one's virtue, is nothing but imposing a well-known denomination upon an obvious attribute, which is far from perfect, comparing to what master Cheng meant by inquiry into a reason by which a thing is as it is and a rule to which it should conform.

The only one that shows a proper understanding of what it means by the word 'investigation', would be the person who says that 'being close to things and affairs, neither loathing nor forsaking it, but exerting oneself to investigate it so as to perfect one's knowledge'. With regard to the means by which things are to be investigated, it is stressed that one must make the resolve so that he may have the root settled; likewise one must hold on to conscientiousness so that his resolve will be preserved. And one's resolve should be established above things, whereas the exercise of conscientiousness will penetrate into the kernel of things. After that is done, one's knowledge will then become perfect. These words seem to accord with the meaning of 'no one is able to extend knowledge without being conscientious'. However it is uttered in a tone that is quite blemished by hastiness, and the meaning of it fails to fully reflect the grand structure of the master Cheng's system, and bears no sign of effortlessness or easiness, nor does it show the effort in long accumulation which will result in a thorough understanding of all.

Alas, master Cheng, as seen in his answer to questions and response to queries, articulates [his thought] in such a clear and comprehensive manner! What a contrast between master Cheng's own words and the theories formulated by his disciples! In spite of one or two places where resonance may be heard, none of the aforementioned interpretation reflects anything better than a partial understanding of master Cheng. In this case it seems that the great teaching had already been deviated even before the departing of the seventy disciples, not to mention that one or two will be expected to develop the teaching and contribute some help to the learners of coming generations.

At leisure and in solitary, I reflect upon what my tutor Yan Ping used to teach. He maintains that at the beginning one should persistently hold onto this mind and never let it be overshadowed by other things. Once coming across an affair, one should focus

on it and make a thorough exploration in order to probe into the principle of it. After this one is fully understood, it is then ready to move gradually and orderly on to the investigation of another affair. If one keeps it up for a long time, the accumulation of this effort will naturally lead one into the state of effortlessness, which cannot be grasped through language. Chewing these words, I find that although the structure of his theory and the logical formulation of it by no means catch up with that of master Cheng, nonetheless what he teaches as to the gradual procedure of the practical effort as well as the profound meaning and the earnest concern has surpassed all the others. Only those who truly make endeavours on this will have a grip of the meaning, it is not easy to resort to oral debate.

**Q50.** 曰、然則所謂格物致知之學、與世之所謂博物洽聞者奚以異。

**A50.** 曰、此以反身窮理爲主、而必究其本末是非之極摯。彼以徇外誇多爲務、而不覈其表裏真妄之實然。必究其極。是以知愈博而心愈明。不覈其實。是以識愈多而心愈窒。此正爲己爲人之所以分、不可不察也。

Question: However what is the difference between an erudite who is highly knowledgeable about things and current affairs and the one who is engaged in the so-called investigation of things and extension of knowledge?

Answer: One aims to reflect upon oneself and to exhaust the Principle, which entails the necessity of an inquiry into the root and the branches, the right and the wrong to the utmost. The other is exposing himself to the external things and is occupied in boasting about his eruditeness, thus overlooks the effort in checking the authenticity of things he has learned, be it concerning the internal or the external, the truth or the illusion. If one takes it as necessary to carry out the investigation to the utmost, it will be the case that the more knowledge he obtains, the more illuminated his mind will become. If one fails to check the authenticity of what he has learned, he will be in the situation that the more he knows, the more narrow-minded he becomes. That is the distinction between the learning for one's own sake and the learning for the sake of others which, ought to be fully aware of.

**Q51.** 或問、六章之指、其詳猶有可得而言者耶。

**A51.** 曰、天下之道二。善與惡而已矣。然揆厥所元而循其次第、則善者天命所賦之本然、惡者物欲所生之邪穢也。是以人之常性莫不有善而無惡。其本心莫不好善而惡惡。

然既有是形體之累、而又爲氣稟之拘。是以物欲之私得以蔽之、而天命之本然者不得而著。其於事物之理、固有瞢然不知其善惡之所在者、亦有僅識其粗、而不能眞知其可好可惡之極者。夫不知善之眞可好、則其好善也、雖曰好之、而未能無不好者以拒之於內、不知惡之眞可惡、則其惡惡也、雖曰惡之、而未能無不惡者以挽之於中。是以不免於苟焉以自欺、而意之所發有不誠者。夫好善而不誠、則非唯不足以爲善、而反有以賊乎其善、惡惡而不誠、則非唯不足以去惡、而適所以長乎其惡。是則其爲害也、徒有甚焉、而何益之有哉。聖人於此、蓋有憂之。故爲大學之教、而必首之以格物致知之目、以開明其心術、使既有以識夫善惡之所在與其可好可惡之必然矣。至此而復進之以必誠其意之說焉、則又欲其謹之於幽獨隱微之奧、以禁止其苟且自欺之萌。而凡其心之所發、如曰好善、則必由中及外無一毫之不好也。如曰惡惡、則必由中及外無一毫之不惡也。夫好善而中無不好、則是其好之也如好好色之眞、欲以快乎己之目、初非爲人而好之也。惡惡而中無不惡、則是其惡之也如惡惡臭之眞、欲以足乎己之鼻、初非爲人而惡之也。所發之實既如此矣、而須臾之頃、纖芥之微、念念相承、又無敢有少間斷焉、則庶乎內外昭融、表裏澄澈、而心無不正、身無不脩矣。若彼小人、幽隱之間實爲不善、而猶欲外託於善以自蓋、則亦不可謂其全然不知善惡之所在、但以不知其眞可好惡、而又不能謹之於獨、以禁止其苟且自欺之萌、是以淪陷至於如此而不自知耳。此章之說、其詳如此。是固宜爲自脩之先務矣。然非有以開其知識之眞、則不能有以致其好惡之實。故必曰欲誠其意者先致其知、又曰知至而后意誠。然猶不敢恃其知之已至、而聽其所自爲也。故又曰必誠其意、必謹其獨、而毋自欺焉。則大學功夫次第相承、首尾爲一、而不假他術以雜乎其間亦可見矣。後此皆然。今不復重出也。

Question: With regard to the essential point of the sixth chapter, is it possible to grasp the details and elaborate upon it?

Answer: The world is ruled by two moral laws, namely the good and the evil. If we are to explore the origin of the two and to trace the proceedings of them, it will be seen that what is good pertains to the natural state when the heavenly decree was initially received; whereas the evil stands for what is vicious and filthy which arises from the physical desire. Therefore the perpetual nature of human beings is entirely good and no evil at all, and the natural state of mind is prone to goodness and disinclined to evil.

However, a human being, once bearing the burden of the physical body, will be restricted by the dispositions he is endowed with. Thus man is surmounted by the selfishness out of the physical desire, and the natural state of the heavenly decree becomes blurred. In that case, his knowledge of the principles of things would surely



be tainted with such an ambiguity that the place where the good or the evil exactly lies is hardly realised; or he would be stuck in a superficial understanding and unable to grasp the ultimate reason which tells why goodness is to be desired and evil be loathed.

Without knowing that goodness is truly loveable, one's love for goodness will by no means be free from being entangled with his dislike for it which is refusing it internally, despite his claiming of the love for it. Without knowing that evil is truly objectionable, one's hate towards evil cannot be free from an inclination for it which arises from within. Therefore self-deception will hardly be avoided and some insincere element will be found in what issues from the will. If one's love for goodness lacks sincerity, one will not merely fail to do good, but worse than that, will deal a damaging blow to goodness. Likewise, if one's hate towards evil lacks sincerity, not only will one fail to dispel evil, but also one will be encouraging the evil because of the insincere element in one's hatred of it. Hence it will only incur damage to a higher degree, how could it bring on any help at all?

Having concerns over this, the sages then set up the education of the great learning which must be initiated with the program of the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge, in order to enlighten one's mind and make one know where exactly the good or the evil lies and also understand the necessity of what is to be loved or loathed. From here one will then be instructed to proceed to the program of making the will sincere, and further be advised to remain vigilant especially in the case when one finds oneself in solitary, so that the kind of sloppiness and self-deception will be nipped in bud. Thereby whatever issues from the mind, if being entitled 'the love for goodness', it will not contain one single tiny bit of dislike for it from within and without; if bearing the name of 'the hate towards evil', there will be no trace of inclination to evil to be found from within and without. That the kind of love for goodness with no tiny bit of dislike for it inhabiting from within, means one's love for it is as genuine as one's love for beauty which, is merely seeking pleasure for one's own eyes rather than doing it for the sake of other people in the first place. That to hate evil with no tiny bit of proneness to it, means one's hatred of it is as genuine as one's dislike for the odour which, aims to content one's own nose rather than doing it on account of others.

Having achieved truthfulness as thus in all things that issue from the mind, this level of honesty would then be preserved at every single moment, in things fine and subtle, and would persist throughout the flowing of thoughts with no interruption in between. Hence the internal and the external would be illuminated and fused into one, the

appearance and the inherence become limpid, never would the rectification of the mind fall through, nor would a failure occur in the personal cultivation.

A mean person, on the contrary, would try to cover his fault by demonstrating himself under the name of goodness, despite all the evil deeds he carried out in solitary. In this case, we cannot say that he is utterly ignorant of the distinction between good and evil, but rather that he does not really know why the good is to be loved and the evil be loathed, what's more, he does not have the capacity to remain vigilant in solitary so as to nip the sort of sloppiness and self-deception in blossom. Hence he has fallen to such an extent with little awareness of it.

The details of this chapter are as thus. Certainly it should be primarily attended to in terms of self-cultivation. However the honesty of one's loving and loathing will never be fully realised unless the truthfulness of one's knowledge is firstly fulfilled. Therefore, it must be stated that one who wants to keep his will sincere has to extend his knowledge in advance, and that after the knowledge is extended, the will would become sincere.

Even after that is attained, one should not then fall back on his own knowledge and follow the direction of the mind wherever it is leading to. For that reason, it is further said that one must keep the will sincere, remain vigilant in solitary, and ought not to deceive oneself. Thereby the practical means of the great learning entails an orderly and coherent procedure, which is obviously independent from other approaches and not to be intermingled with them. All the following are stated in like manner, I am not going to repeat it here.

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